SAMURAI EXECUTIONER

首斬り朝

VOLUME 9 **FACING LIFE AND DEATH**

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

首斬り朝

SAMURAI EXECUTIONER

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Punished is not the man himself,
but the evil that resides in him.

story
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by KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

9

A NOTE TO READERS

Samurai Executioner is a carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

SAMURAI EXECUTIONER 首斬り朝

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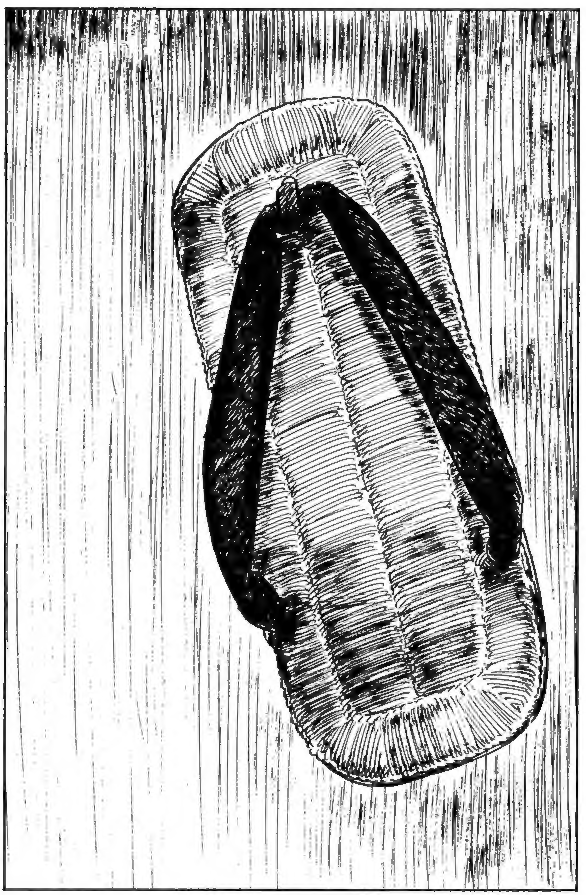
Rain or Shine Street



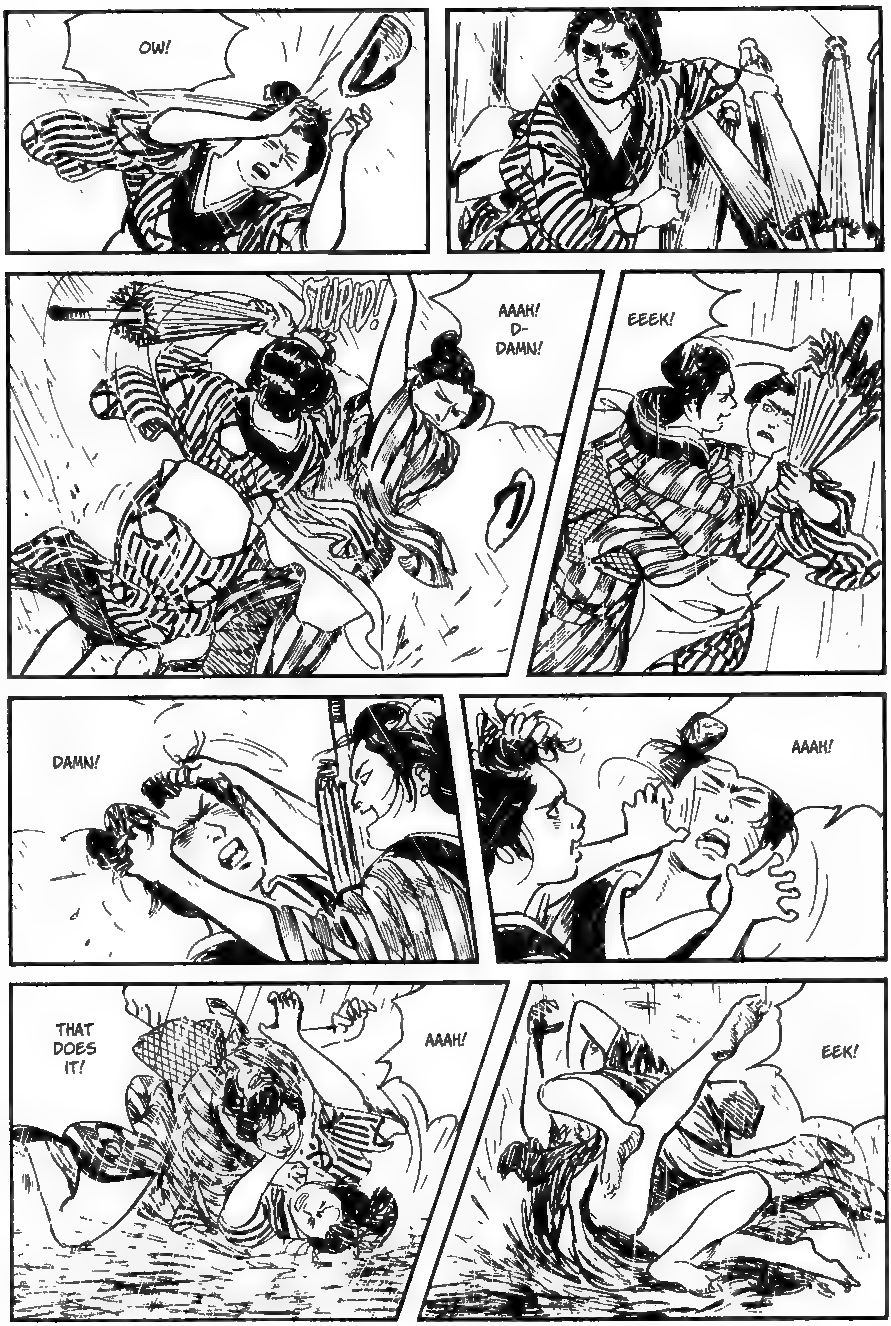
ASSHOLE!
WHY, YOU...
SH-- SHIT!
Y-YOU SCUM!

SHIT!
UNGH!
SPLASH!
SPLISH!
SPLASH!
S-- STOP IT!
GET HIM, DEAR!

PLEASE STOP IT!
HIT HIM SO HARD HE WON'T STAND FOR DAYS!
OOH...
DAMN YOU!
SHIT!
DIE, YOU SUN-LOVER!
I'LL KILL YA, RAIN-LOVER!

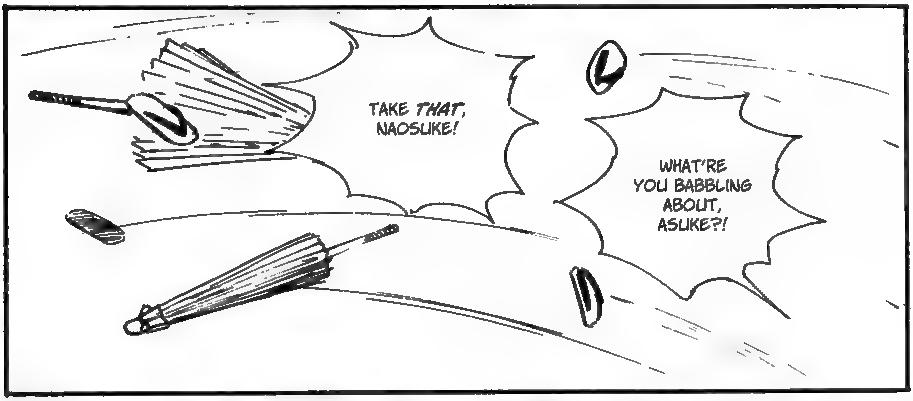
OOMPH!
DAMN!
ARRRGH!
URRRGH!
STOP IT! STOP IT ALREADY!
WHAT'RE YOU DOING, DEAR?!

HURRY UP AND GET HIM!
C'MON, C'MON!
O-O-SHIMA-SAN! DON'T SAY THAT! STOP THEM!
SHUT UP! MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS, YOU UGLY BITCH!
H-HOW COULD YOU SAY THAT, O-SHIMA-SAN? IF ONE OF THEM GETS HURT...
WHO SAID THAT'S GONNA HAPPEN?! THE FIGHT'LL BE DECIDED ANY MOMENT NOW! IS IT GONNA BE CURTAINS FOR OUR STORE--OR IS YOUR STORE GONNA RUN OFF INTO THE NIGHT?!
NOW'S YOUR CHANCE!
I-IT'S RAINING! I-IT CAN'T BE...
SHADDUP!


OW!
STUPID!
AAAH! D-DAMN!
EEEK!
DAMN!
AAAH!
THAT DOES IT!
AAAH!
EEK!

ASSHOLE!
SHIT!
DAMN!
EEK!
YOU...!
SH-SHIT!

STOP IT!
STOP IT!
STOP IT! CAN'T YOU KNOCK IT OFF?!
THAT'S ENOUGH!
I TOLD YOU TO STOP IT!
DO THIS ONE MORE TIME, AND WE'LL BUST YOU!

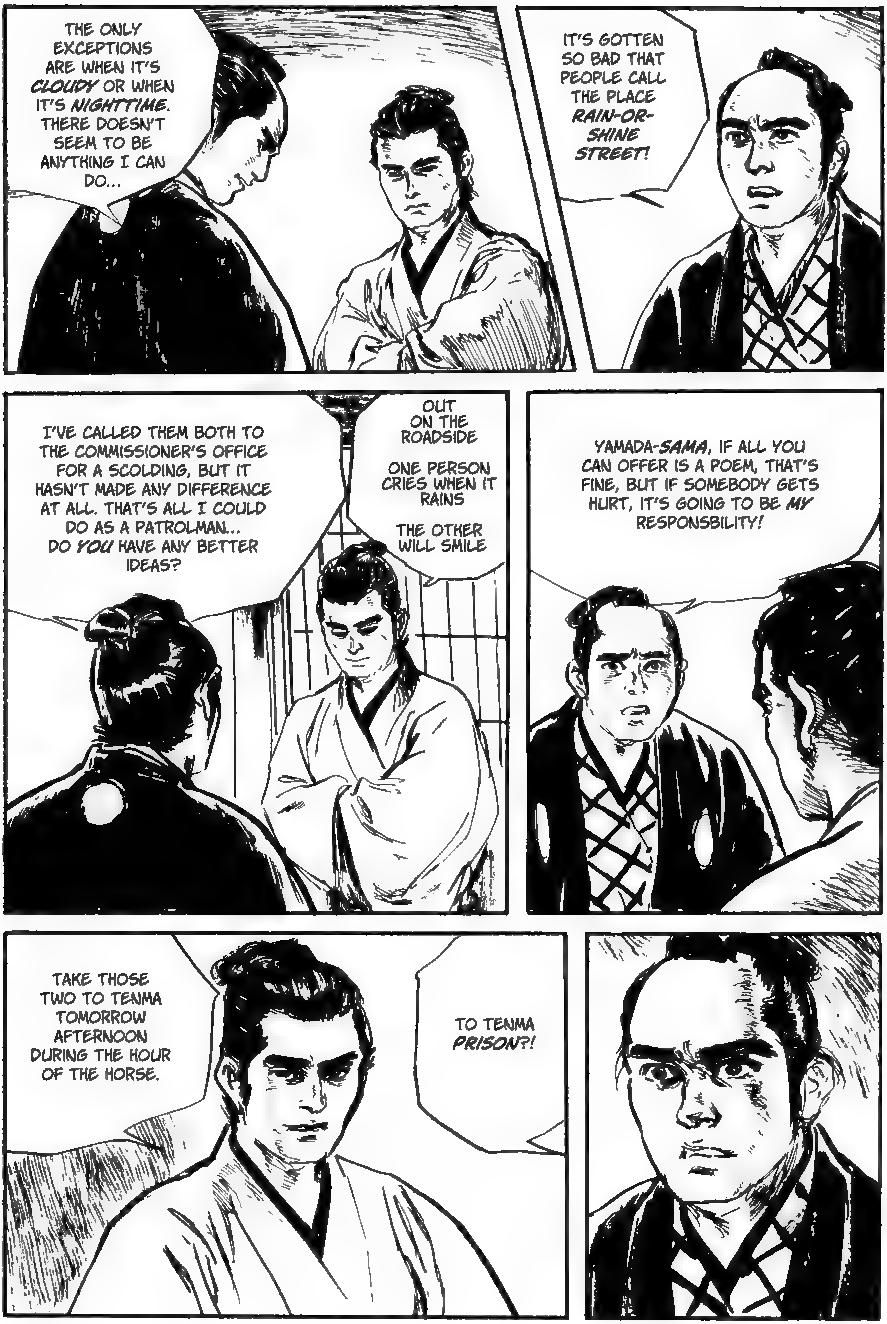

TAKE THAT, NAOSUKE!
WHAT'RE YOU BABBLING ABOUT, ASUKE?!

ASSHOLE!
WHY, YOU...!
DAMN!
EEK!

STOP IT!
CAN'T YOU KNOCK IT OFF?!
I TOLD YOU TO STOP IT!
THAT'S ENOUGH!
NEXT TIME I'M BUSTING YOU FOR REAL!
PANT PANT
PANT PANT

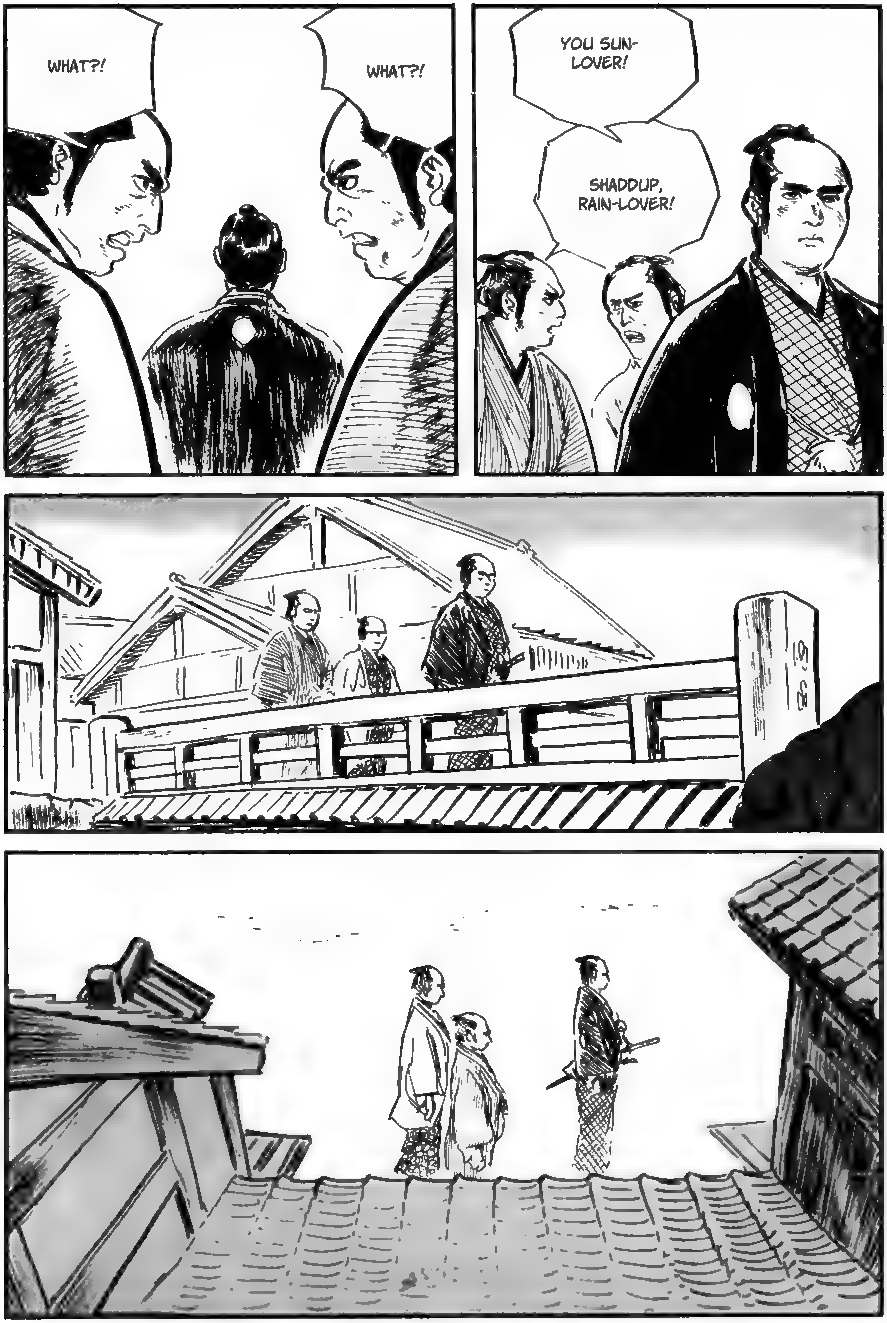
PLEASE LET IT SHINE!
足助屋
PLEASE LET IT RAIN!

WHY DON'T YOU GIVE IT UP?
IF YOU ACT UP THIS TIME, I WILL CART YOU GUYS OFF!
IT'S THE SETTA SELLER AND THE UMBRELLA SELLER ON THE SIDE STREET FROM YOSHI-CHŌ TO OYAJIBASHI.
諸行無常
是生滅法
生滅滅已
寂滅為樂
THEY FIGHT ABOUT EVERY THREE DAYS. I'M AT A TOTAL LOSS AS TO WHAT TO DO WITH THEM.
WHEN THE SUN SHINES, ASUKE THE SETTA SELLER'S HAPPY. AND WHEN IT RAINS, NAOSUKE THE UMBRELLA SELLER'S HAPPY.
THEY'RE ALWAYS FIGHTING, RAIN OR SHINE.

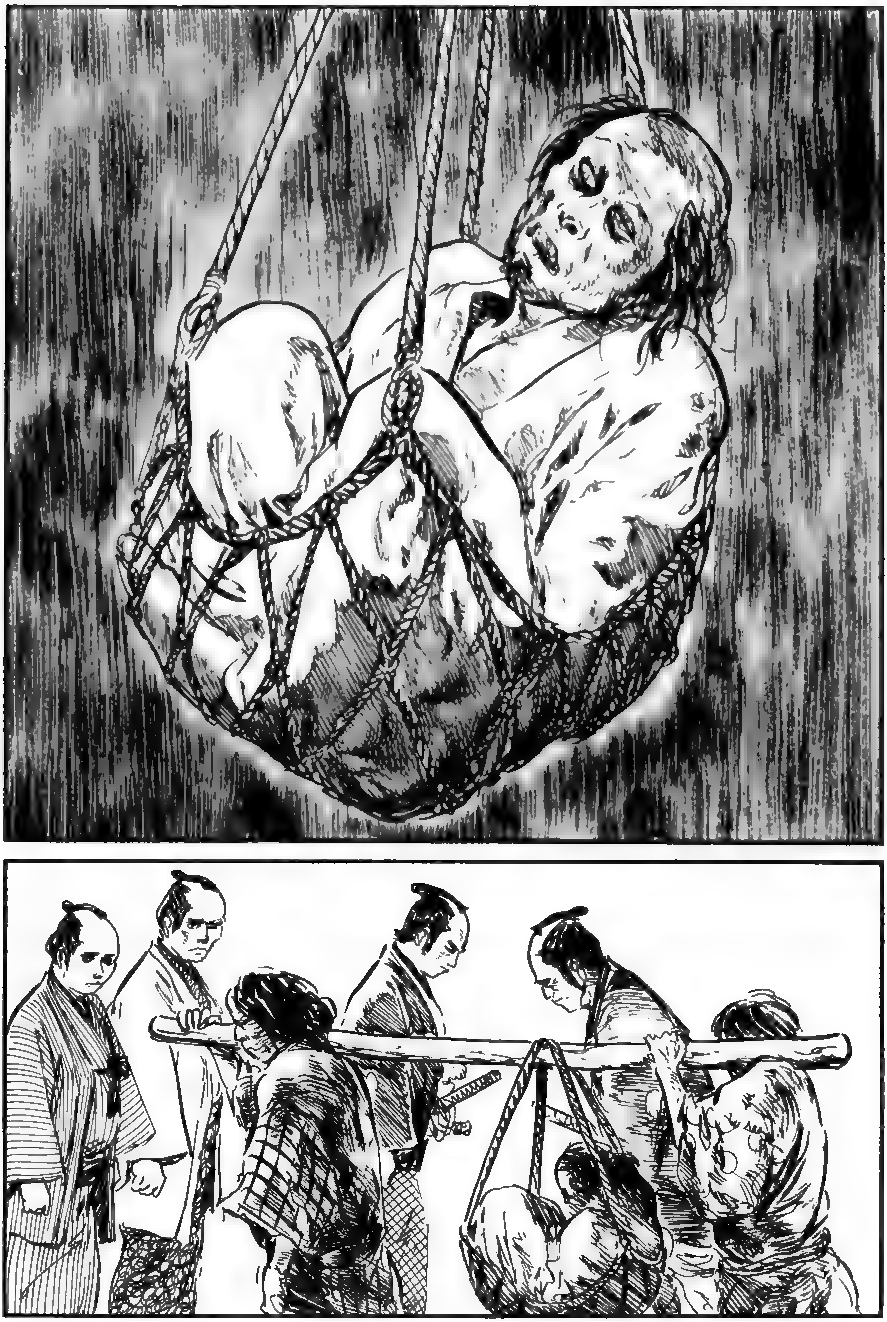

THE ONLY EXCEPTIONS ARE WHEN IT'S *CLOUDY* OR WHEN IT'S *NIGHTTIME*. THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANYTHING I CAN DO...
IT'S GOTTEN SO BAD THAT PEOPLE CALL THE PLACE *RAIN-OR-SHINE STREET*!
I'VE CALLED THEM BOTH TO THE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE FOR A SCOLDING, BUT IT HASN'T MADE ANY DIFFERENCE AT ALL. THAT'S ALL I COULD DO AS A PATROLMAN... DO *YOU* HAVE ANY BETTER IDEAS?
OUT ON THE ROADSIDE
ONE PERSON CRIES WHEN IT RAINS
THE OTHER WILL SMILE
YAMADA-*SAMA*, IF ALL YOU CAN OFFER IS A POEM, THAT'S FINE, BUT IF SOMEBODY GETS HURT, IT'S GOING TO BE *MY* RESPONSBILITY!
TAKE THOSE TWO TO TENMA TOMORROW AFTERNOON DURING THE HOUR OF THE HORSE.
TO TENMA *PRISON*?!

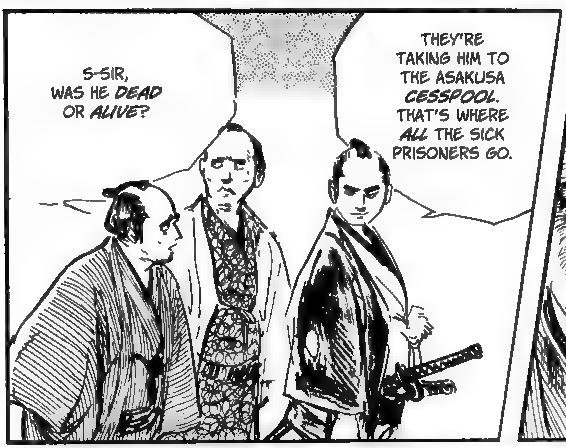
BY THE WAY, SIR, WHERE ARE YOU TAKING US?

UM, SIR?
LOOKS LIKE IT'S GOING TO *SHOWER*, SIR.
AND IF IT DOES, MY BUSINESS WILL BE BOOMING, SO I CAN'T GO TOO FAR FROM MY STORE.
HAH. THINK IT'S REALLY GONNA *RAIN*?
I THINK THE SKIES ARE GONNA *CLEAR* SINCE THE WIND STARTED BLOWING. SO *MY* BUSINESS WILL BE BOOMING.

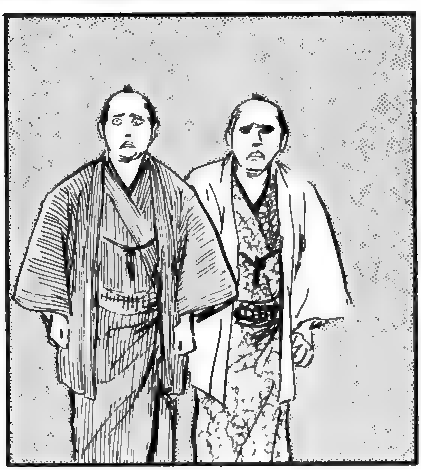

WHAT?!
WHAT?!
YOU SUN-LOVER!
SHADDUP, RAIN-LOVER!

WE'LL SOON BE AT TENMA PRISON.
SIR, JUST WHERE *ARE* YOU TAKING US?
SIR?
SIR, THE *PRISON'S* JUST AHEAD
SIR, YOU *CAN'T* BE...




S-SIR, WAS HE *DEAD* OR *ALIVE*?
THEY'RE TAKING HIM TO THE ASAKUSA *CESSPOOL*. THAT'S WHERE *ALL* THE SICK PRISONERS GO.

THE *CESSPOOL*...?!

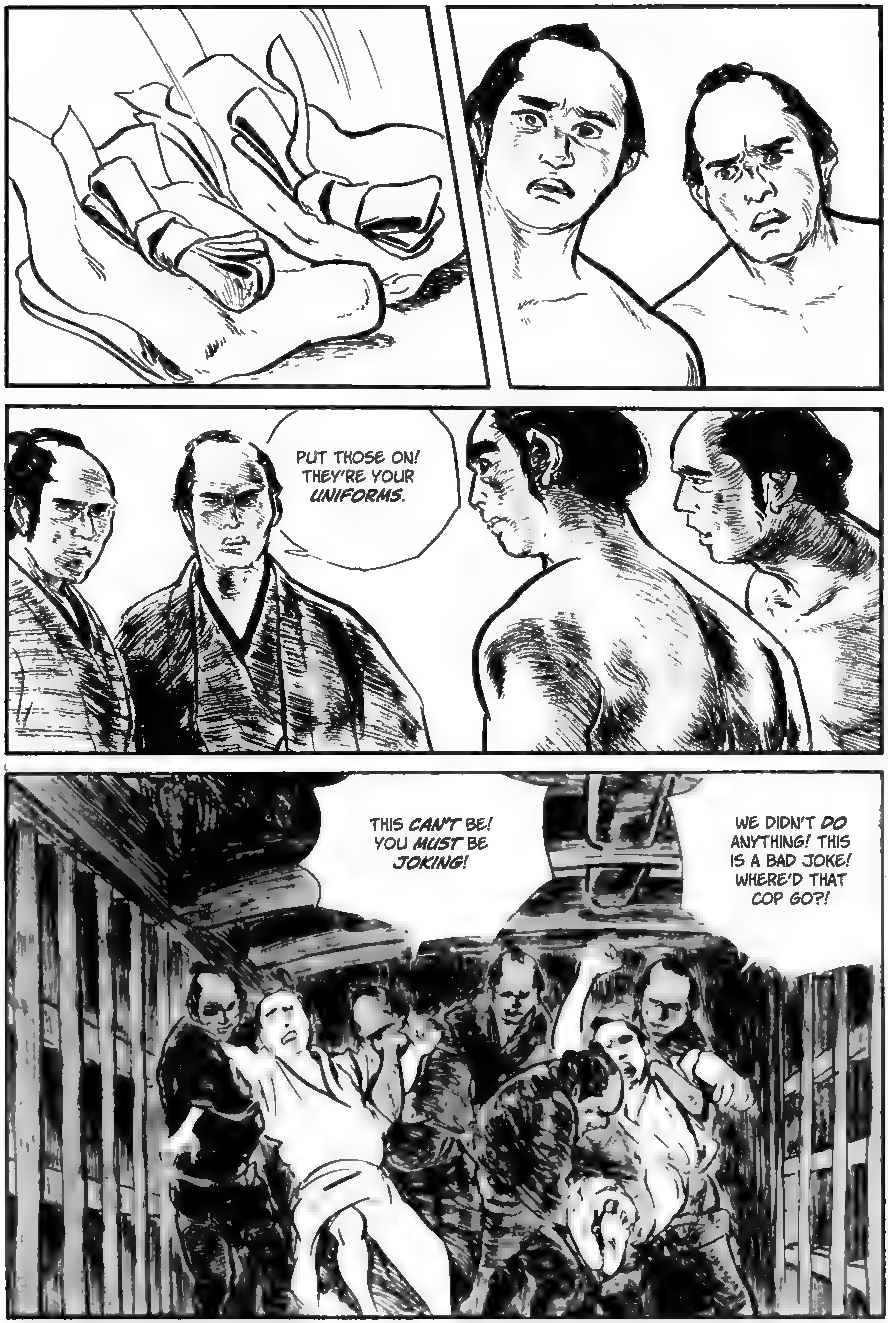


COME!
S-SIR, WHY DO WE HAVE TO GO INTO THE PRISON..?
W-WE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING. I DON'T WANNA GO IN. IT'LL BE LIKE GOING TO MY GRAVE!
SHUT UP AND FOLLOW ME!

WELL, THAT'LL BE FINE.
WE UNDERSTAND.

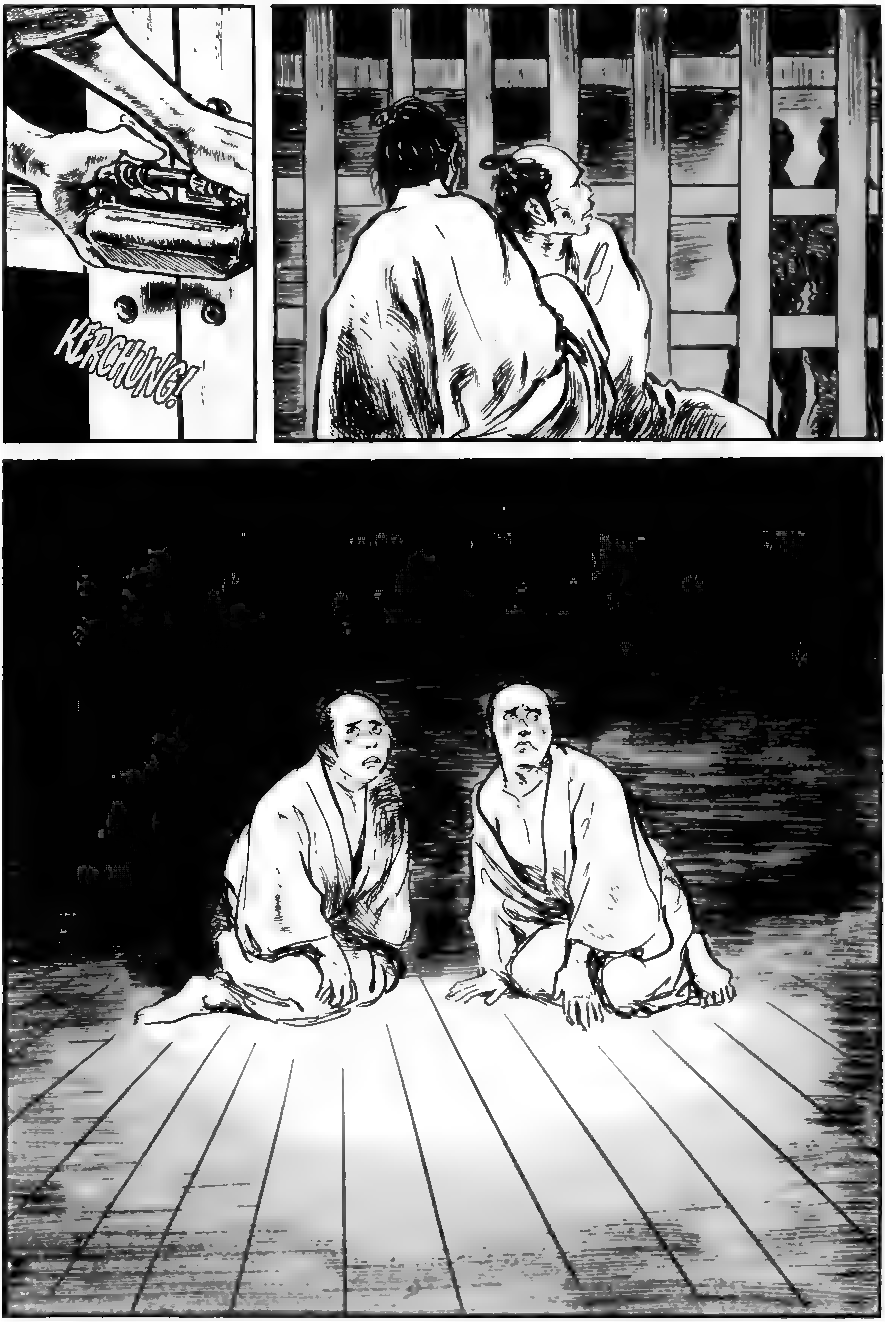
OH, SIR!
W-WHERE ARE YOU GOING, SIR?

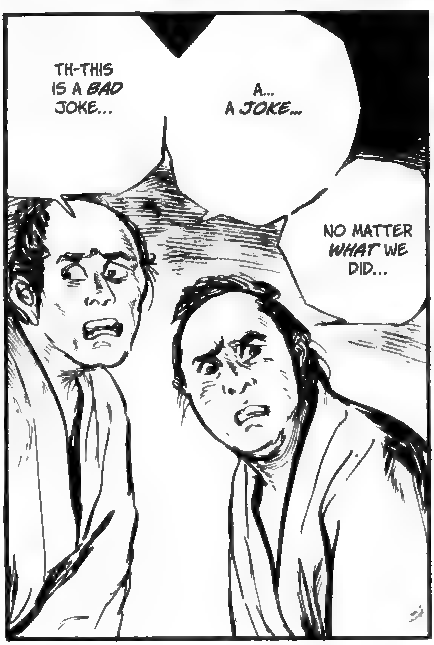
W-WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
W-WHAT IN THE WORLD'S GOING ON?!
U-UM... M-MY LOINCLOTH...
S-STOP IT!


PUT THOSE ON! THEY'RE YOUR UNIFORMS.
THIS CAN'T BE! YOU MUST BE JOKING!
WE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING! THIS IS A BAD JOKE! WHERE'D THAT COP GO?!

GO CALL HIM, WILL YOU?! PLEASE?!

TH-THERE MUST BE SOME *MISTAKE*...
W-WHAT DID THAT COP *DO* TO US?!
W-WHAT DID *WE* DO TO DESERVE *THIS*?!
KLIK


KERCHUNG!


TH-THIS IS A BAD JOKE...
A... A JOKE...
NO MATTER WHAT WE DID...

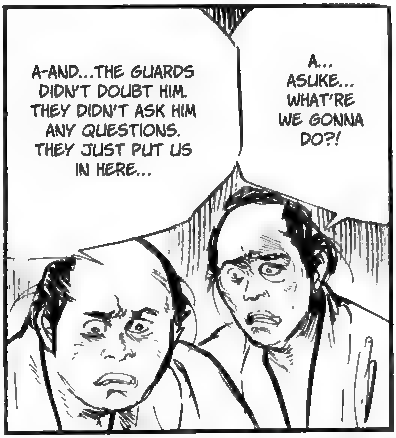
I-IS HE TRYING TO PUNISH US FOR FIGHTING...?
OR...

D-DID HE THINK WE'D BECOME *FRIENDS* IF WE WERE THROWN INTO A PLACE LIKE *THIS*?!
Y-YOU'RE *RIGHT*. YOU *HAVE* TO BE!
B-BUT WE DON'T *DESERVE* TO GO TO PRISON.

HE NEEDS A *WARRANT* TO IMPRISON US. I HEAR HE COULD GET ONE *STRAIGHT* FROM THE COMMISIONER...

WE DIDN'T DO *NOTHING*. HOW COULD HE GET A WARRANT FOR *US*?
OH...

S-SAKANE MAY BE A GREAT PATROLMAN, BUT EVEN *HE* DOESN'T HAVE THAT KIND OF POWER. THIS PRISON ISN'T HIS *PERSONAL TOY*...
TH-THEN WE...


A-AND...THE GUARDS DIDN'T DOUBT HIM. THEY DIDN'T ASK HIM ANY QUESTIONS. THEY JUST PUT US IN HERE...
A... ASUKE... WHAT'RE WE GONNA DO?!

THERE'S *NOTHING* WE *CAN* DO... EXCEPT TRY TO ASK ONE OF THE WORKERS...

GRUB!
GRUB!
W-WHAT...
...IS THAT?!
GRUB!
GRUB!
GRUB!
GRUB!

THANK YOU!
THANK YOU!
THANK
"THANK YOU"? WHAT'RE THEY SAYING *THAT* FOR?
HEY, HERE'S YOUR *GRUB!*

IT'S YOUR FOOD. DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME?!
WE SERVE GRUB IN THE MORNING AND THE EVENING. REMEMBER THAT!
BUT YOU GUYS WILL ONLY GET YOUR MORNING GRUB. YOU WON'T NEED ANY DINNER.

THE TOILET'S IN THE CORNER. TAKE OFF THE BOARD TO USE IT.
AFTER YOU'RE DONE EATING, LEAVE THE UTENSILS IN THE FOOD SLOT.
W-WAIT!
W-WHY WERE WE BROUGHT... HERE?! PLEASE TELL US!
I DUNNO.
WE DIDN'T DO NOTHING! REALLY!
WE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING THIS BAD!
I'LL TELL YOU WHAT I DO KNOW...

THIS IS A PROVISIONAL CELL. THE REAL BAD GUYS GO INTO THE MAIN JAIL.
YAMADA-SAMA'S IN CHARGE OF THIS CELL.
Y-YAMADA-SAMA?
Y-YOU MEAN THE EXECUTIONER?
THIS CELL'S ONLY USED WHEN HE HAS A SWORD TO TEST.
T-T-TEST?!
YES, A TEST CUT.
WITH THE SHOGUN'S SWORD.
HE'S GONNA TEST IT TOMORROW ON LIVE BODIES.
THREE OR SO MEN'LL BE CALLED OUT.

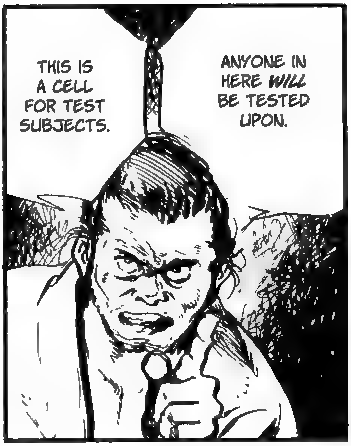
I-IT CAN'T BE...
W-WE'RE GONNA BE THOSE... B-BODIES!
E-EVEN THOUGH WE DIDN'T DO NOTHING... TH-THAT CAN'T BE!
H-HE SAID THERE WERE GONNA BE THREE BODIES...WE'RE JUST TWO...THEY'RE MISSING ONE.
Y-YEAH. S-SO THOSE THREE...
...M-MUST BE... S-SOMEWHERE ELSE. TH-THEY WERE JUST TRYING TO SCARE US!
WHEW!

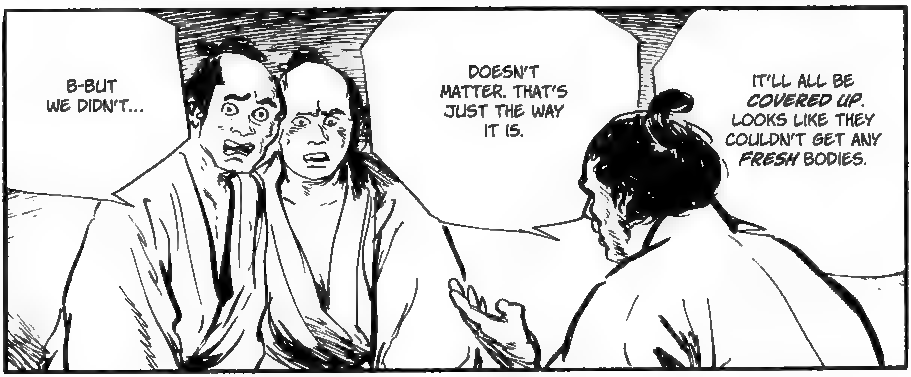
KERCHUNG-
SQUEAK
N-NOW THERE'S THREE...
...OF US!

AREN'T YOU GONNA EAT?
I ALREADY ATE OUT THERE, SO THERE'S STILL FOUR-FIFTHS LEFT. HAVE IT.
SPOOSH
CHOMP
CHOMP
I'M ONLY GONNA LIVE UNTIL NOON TOMORROW.
ALL I CAN DO IS EAT AND SLEEP.
HEE HEE...

W-WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN TO YOU?
Y-YOU SAID YOU'RE ONLY GONNA LIVE UNTIL NOON TOMORROW...
SHADDUP!
WHY'D YOU GOTTA *RUB IT IN*?!
HE'S GONNA TEST A SWORD... ON *YOU*!
AAAH!
GASP!
B-BUT WE DIDN'T DO *NOTHING*!
WE WERE BROUGHT HERE... OUT OF THE BLUE... TH-THERE'S *GOTTA* BE SOME *MISTAKE*!

GET A GRIP, FOOLS!
THERE'S NO POINT IN STRUGGLING.


THIS IS A CELL FOR TEST SUBJECTS.
ANYONE IN HERE *WILL* BE TESTED UPON.


B-BUT WE DIDN'T...
DOESN'T MATTER. THAT'S JUST THE WAY IT IS.
IT'LL ALL BE *COVERED UP*. LOOKS LIKE THEY COULDN'T GET ANY *FRESH* BODIES.

B-BUT WE'RE NOT *FISH*!
QUIT YOUR QUIVERING AND GO TO SLEEP! *GIVING UP'S* THE KEY TO BEING A MAN.

S-SO... WHAT'RE WE GONNA...?
TH-THIS IS... A DREAM. A NIGHTMARE. THAT'S WHAT IT'S GOTTA BE...
GASP!
AAAH!
AAAAH!
AAAAH!
AAAAH!

NOOO! I DON'T WANNA DIE!
I DON'T WANT NO SWORDS TESTED ON ME!
AAAH! NOOO!
HELLLP!
GIMME A WOMAN... A WOMAN...
LEMME HAVE SOME SAKE... JUST A JUG...
NOBBY NOBBY

GLUG GLUG GLUG
DON'T YOU GUYS WANT SOME?
IF YOU WANT, I'LL LET YOU HAVE SOME!
GASP!
TH-THERE'S GOTTA BE SOME MISTAKE!
C-CALL O-OFFICER SAKANE!
SHUT UP!

ZZZ
ZZZ
ZZz
Zzz
TAP
TAP
GASP!

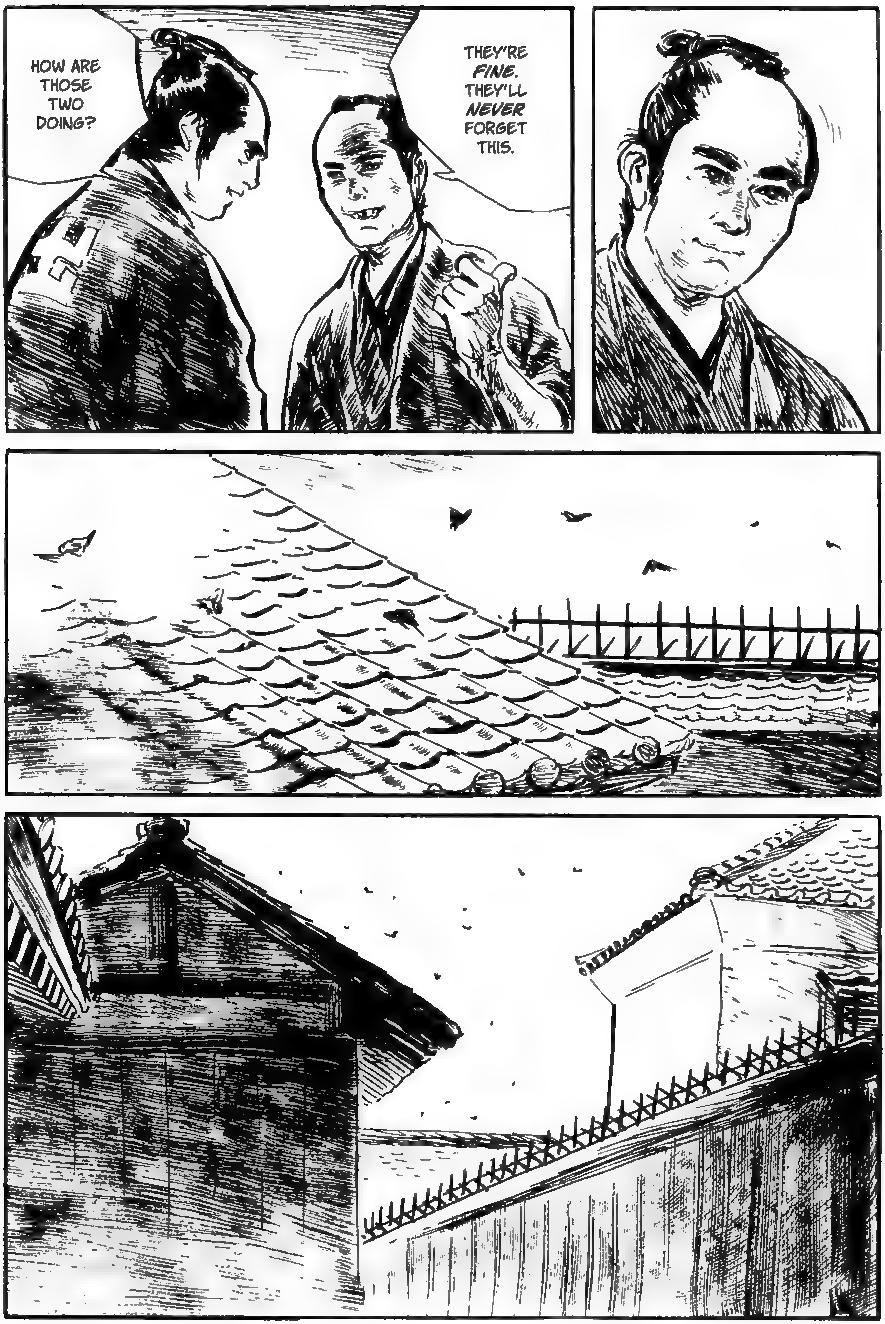
GASP!
OHHH...
I BROUGHT A JUG OF SAKE FOR *YOU.*
HERE.
GLUNK
YOU'RE GONNA BE *TESTED ON* TOMORROW.
THIS IS YOUR *LAST* DRINK. HEH HEH.

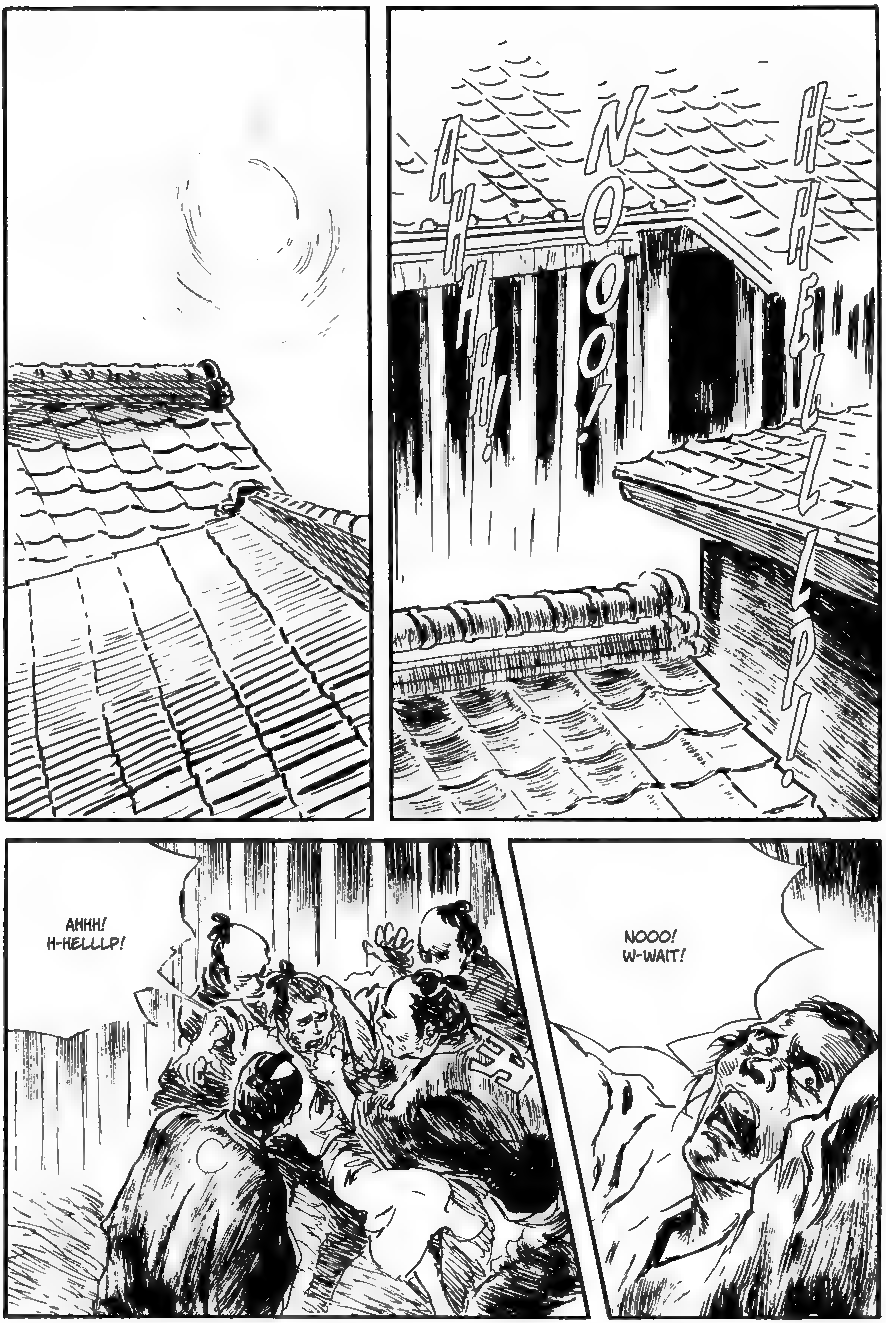
THERE'S BITS OF KOREAN MORNING GLORY INSIDE... IT'LL CALM YOU DOWN AND MAKE YOU FALL ASLEEP.
TELL US!
W-WHY ARE WE GONNA BE TEST SUBJECTS?!
W-WE DIDN'T DO NOTHING!
ALL YOU GUYS DO ALL YEAR IS FIGHT AND THREATEN TO KILL EACH OTHER AND SET EACH OTHER'S STORES ON FIRE.
THEY CALL YOUR STREET "RAIN-OR-SHINE," RIGHT?!

YOU DIDN'T JUST WASTE THE AUTHORITIES' TIME *ONCE OR TWICE*. NO, YOU DID THAT *EVERY DAY*.
LISTEN UP! THE COMMISSIONER IS *MAD*.
GUYS LIKE YOU ARE GONNA DO SOMETHING *SERIOUS* SOMEDAY. AND SO WE'RE GONNA NIP YOU IN THE *BUD*.
THAT'S WHY YOU'LL BE TESTED UPON.
OFFICER SAKANE *TRIED* TO HELP YOU GUYS.
AND NOW LOOK AT YOU TWO--ONLY WHEN YOU'RE ABOUT TO *LEAVE* THIS WORLD DO YOU GUYS STOP FIGHTING--IN *PRISON*!

PEOPLE CAN'T LIVE EXPECTING EVERYTHING TO GO *THEIR* WAY.
HOW COULD YOU EXPECT TO SUMMON THE RAIN OR THE SUN? YOU GUYS WERE BEING *RIDICULOUS*.
THAT'S JUST *INCONVENIENCE*. AND YOU GUYS MADE THINGS REAL INCONVENIENT FOR *YOURSELVES*.
PEOPLE WHO MAKE THINGS INCONVENIENT END UP IN *PRISON*.
REMEMBER THIS...
...WEATHER'S JUST LIKE *LIFE*. SOMETIMES SUNNY, SOMETIMES CLOUDY, SOMETIMES RAINY.
IT'D BE *NICE* IF IT WERE *ALWAYS* SUNNY, BUT IT'S *NOT*, AND YOU JUST GOTTA TAKE IT.

AND THOSE WHO *CAN'T* TAKE IT CAN ONLY END UP *HERE* IN PRISON.
THANKS FOR EVERYTHING.


HOW ARE THOSE TWO DOING?
THEY'RE FINE. THEY'LL NEVER FORGET THIS.


AHHH!!
NOO!
HELL
LP!
AHHH!
H-HELLLP!
NOOO!
W-WAIT!

AHHH!
I DON'T WANT NO SWORDS TESTED ON ME!
AGHHH!
HE... HE... HELLL... PPP...

GASP!
OHHH...
TODAY WE NEED *ONE* MORE GUY FOR TESTING.
YOU LOOK GOOD. COME OUT!
OHHH...
AAAH!
H-H-HELLLP!

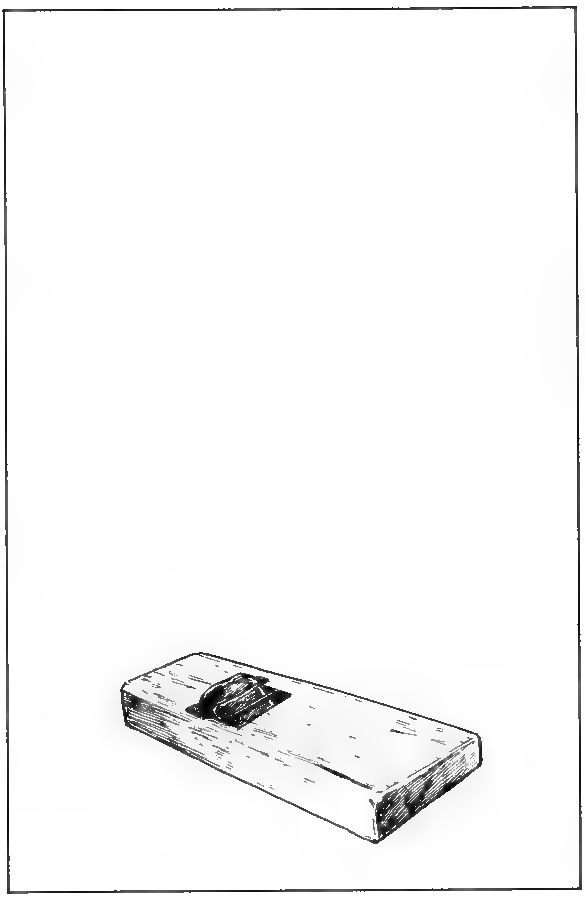
HELLLP!
AAAA
P-PLEASE SAVE ME!
AAAH!
F-FROM NOW ON... I'M NEVER GONNA FIGHT WITH ASUKE... EVER AGAIN....
IS THAT SO? THEN YOU'RE THE ONE WE WANT!
GASP!

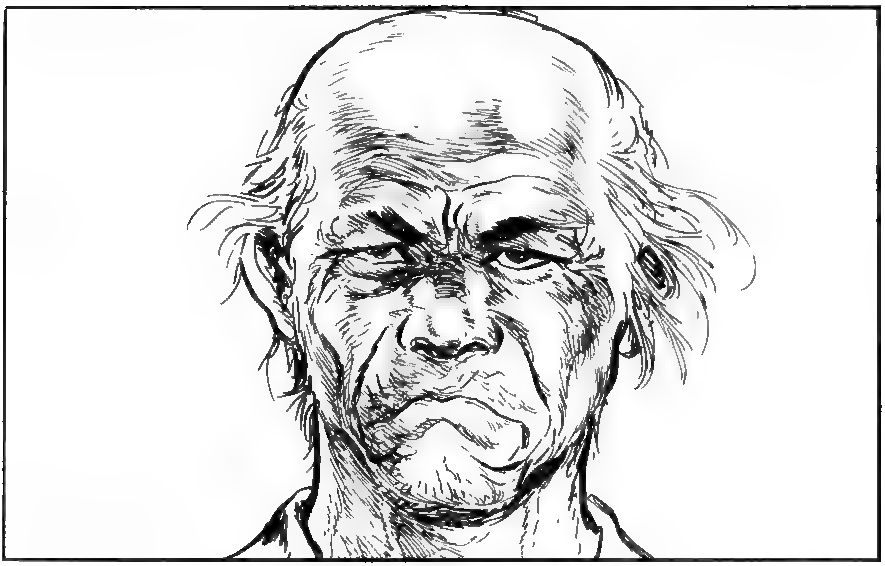
P-PLEASE SAVE ME!
THAT'S ENOUGH.
HOW'S IT FEEL TO GET A GLIMPSE OF HELL?

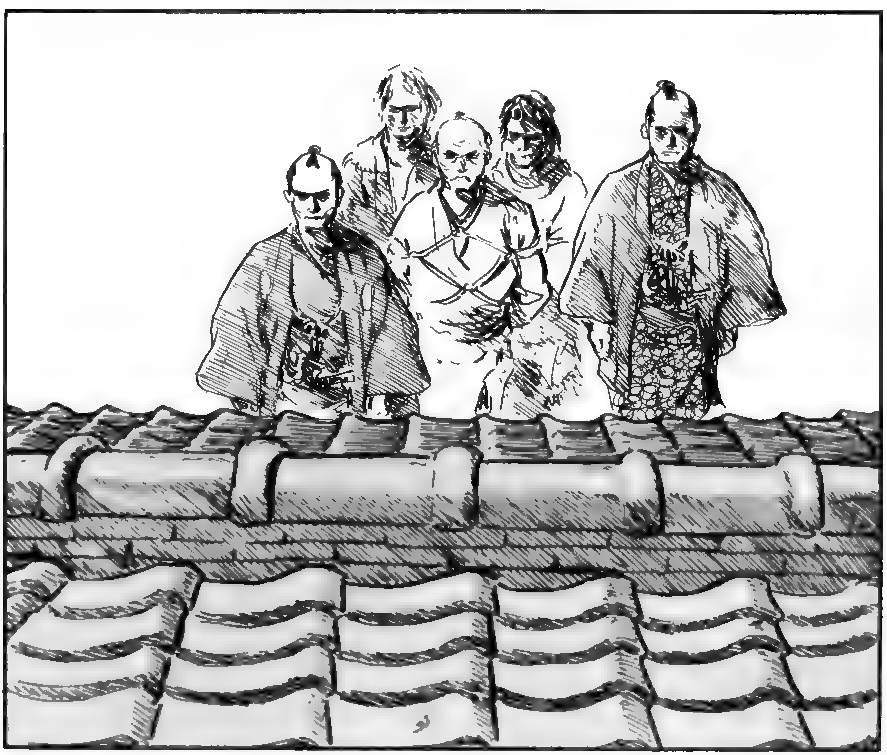
THAT'S YAMADA ASAEMON-SAMA.

the forty-second

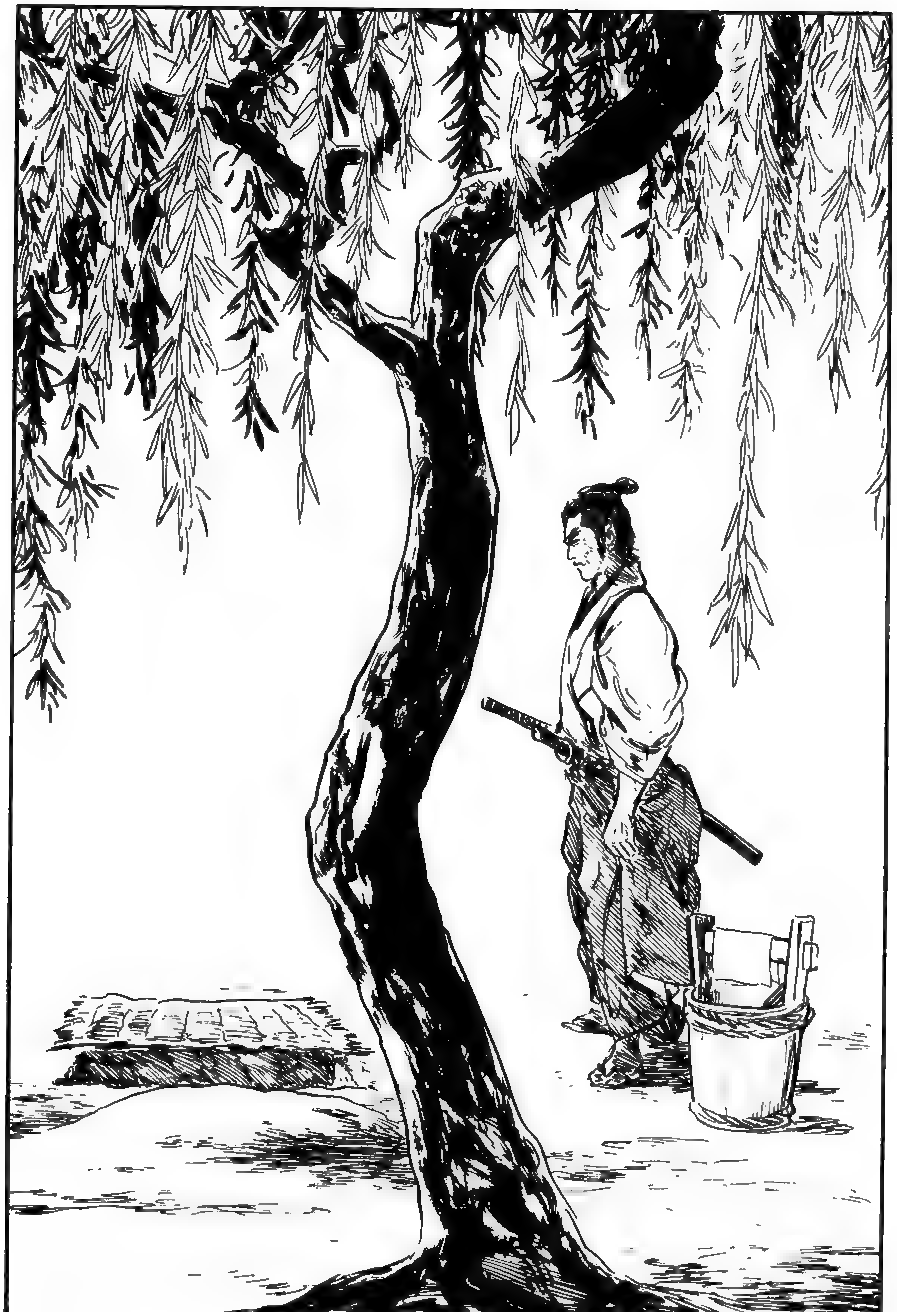
The Artisan

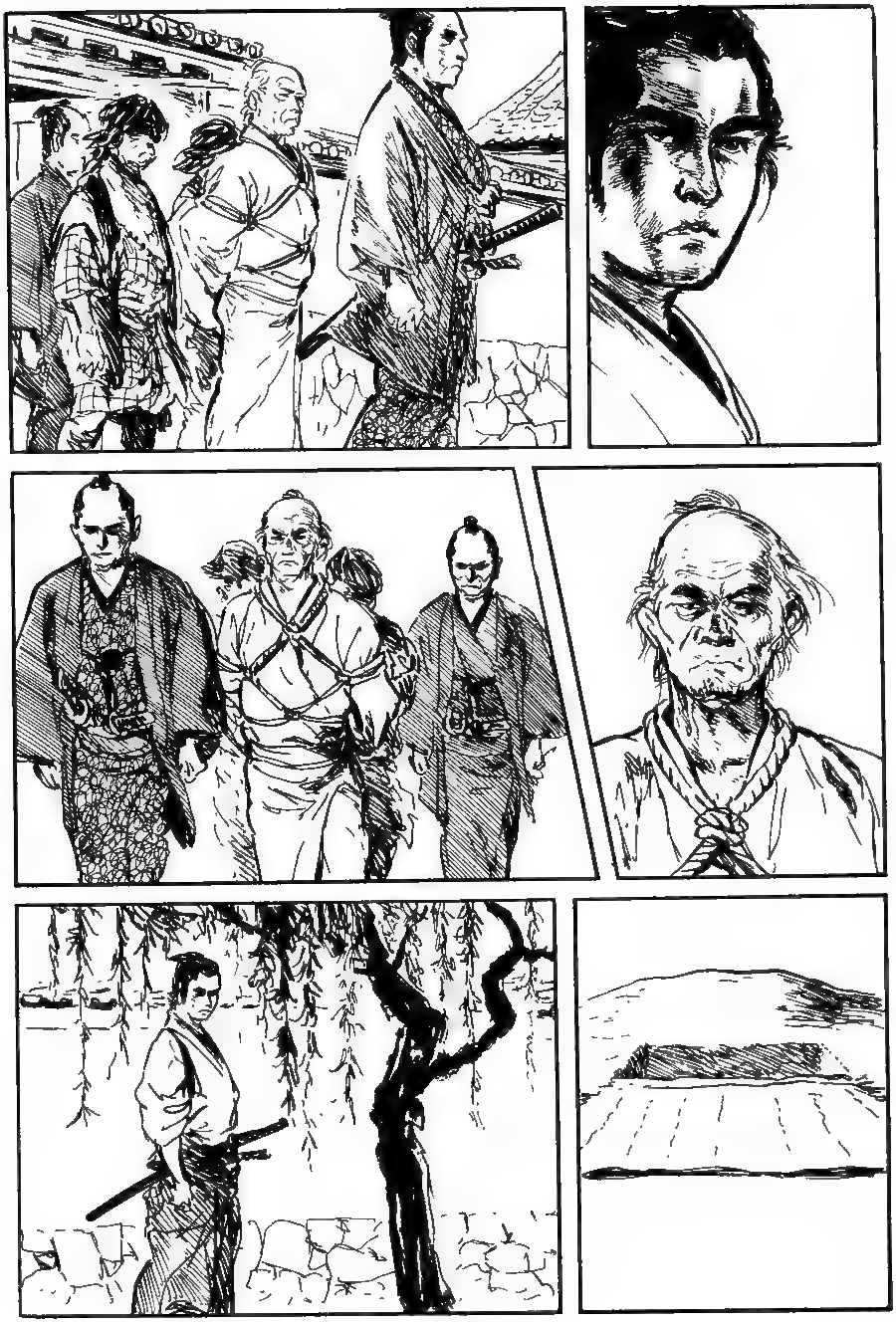


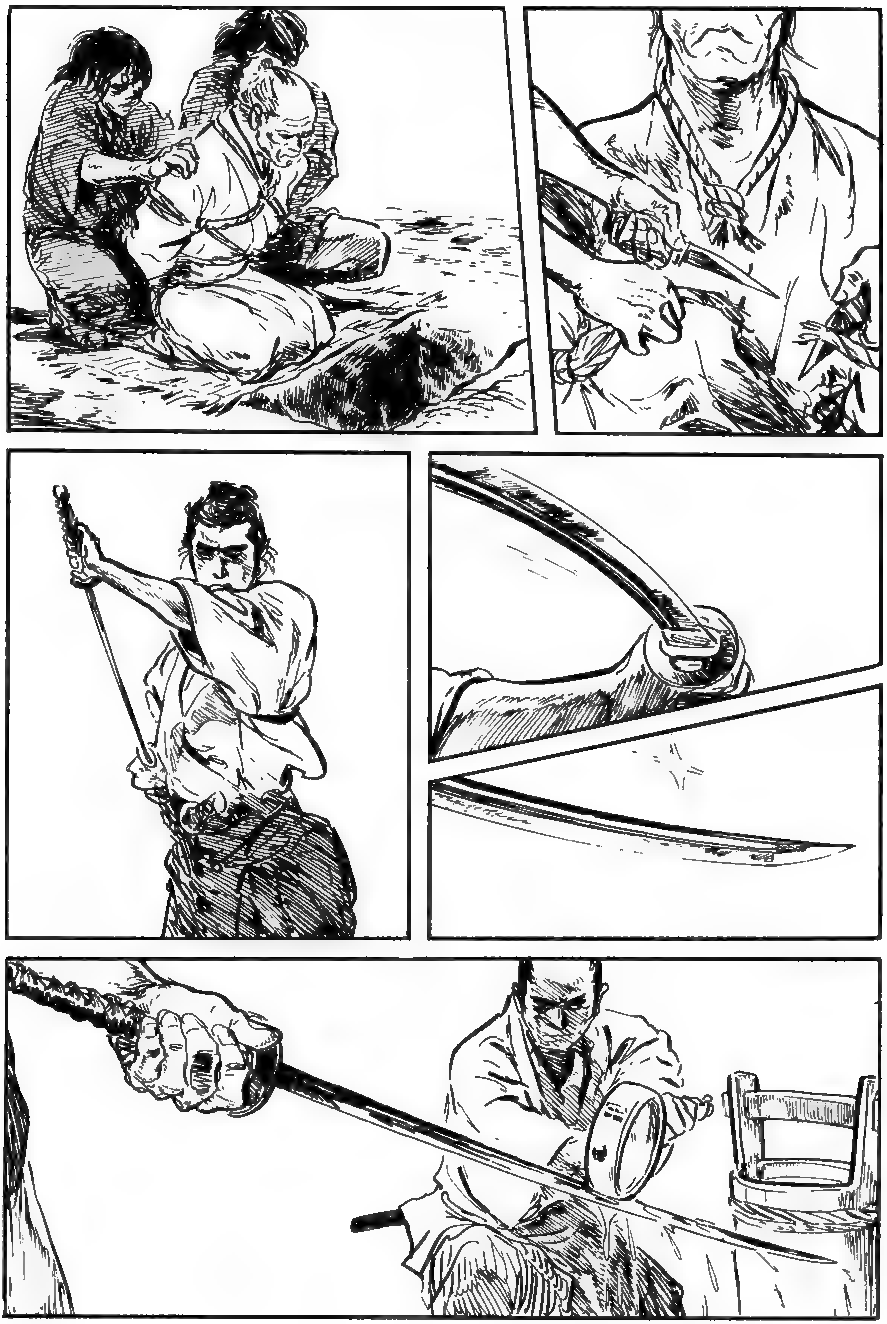




KOFF
PTUI!
WHAT'S WITH *YOU*?!
WHY'D YOU *SPIT* ON THE PAPER?!
YOU GOT IT ALL *WRONG*.
IT'S BECAUSE I THOUGHT YOU OFFERED THE PAPER TO DO ME A *FAVOR*.
OH, OKAY. NO POINT IN GETTING MAD AT SOMEBODY WHO'S GONNA LOSE HIS *HEAD*.







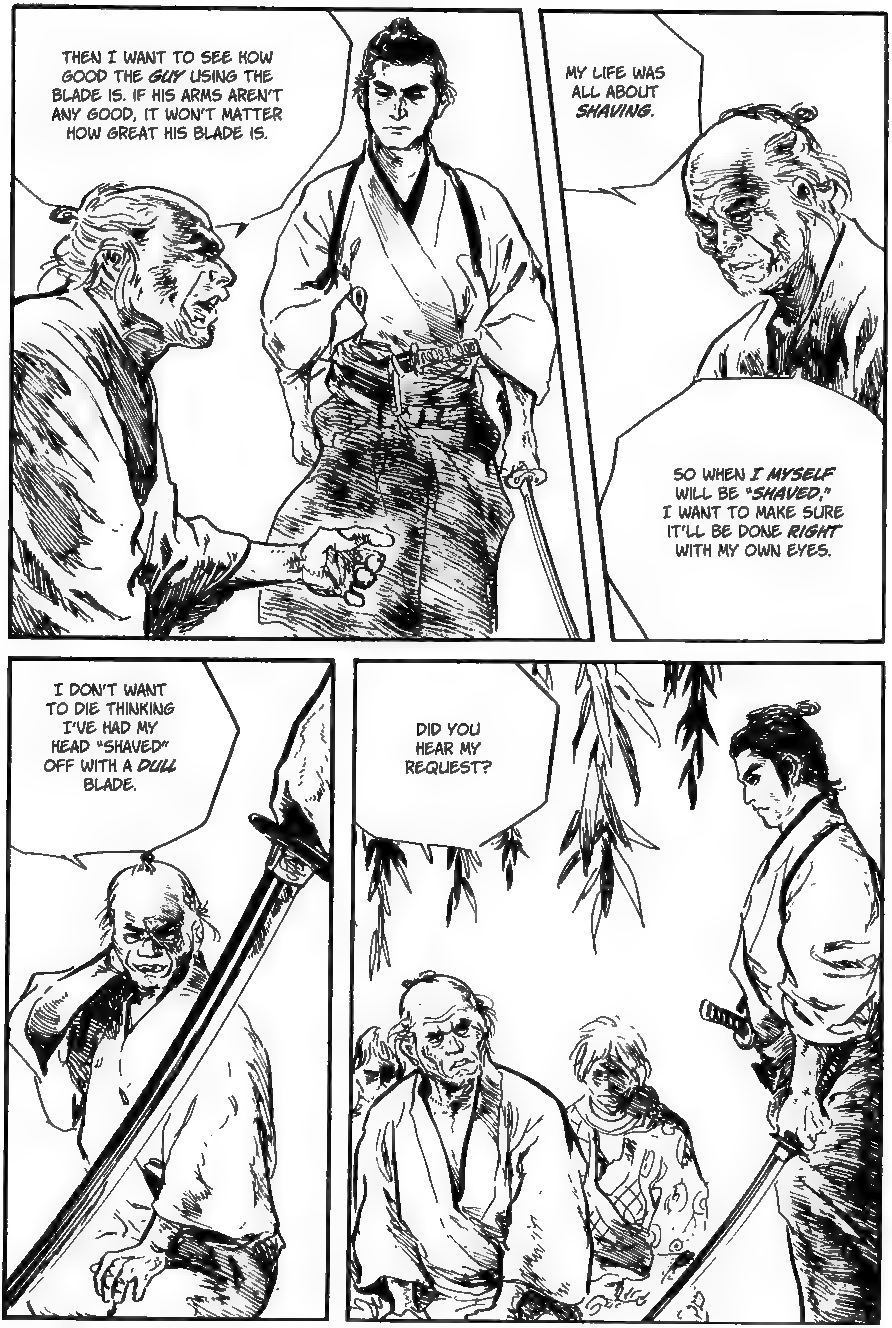
DO YOU HAVE ANY LAST WORDS?
I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING LEFT TO SAY EXCEPT FOR *TWO REQUESTS.*

I'M TŌBEE THE CARPENTER.
FROM THE DAY I WAS BORN, I SPENT MY WHOLE LIFE SHAVING WOOD.
I'M NOT PROUD TO DIE LIKE THIS, BUT NOBODY WAS BETTER WITH A PLANER THAN ME!
NEVER HEARD OF ME, HUH?
I WAS THE ONLY CARPENTER IN EDO WHO COULD SHAVE THREE HUNDRED PIECES OF SIDING A DAY!
THEY'D BE ROUGH BOARDS TWO BU AND THREE RIN THICK, SIX SHAKU LONG AND ONE SHAKU WIDE. ALL THAT CEDAR WOULD PILE UP.
MOST GUYS COULD ONLY DO ONE HUNDRED FIFTY BOARDS. THEY COULDN'T BEAT ME.

MY JOB WASN'T JUST ABOUT *QUANTITY*. SOMETIMES I'D SPEND *TWO DAYS* MAKING A *SINGLE* PILLAR.
I'D HOLD MY FOUR-*SUN* PLANER...
...AND I'D BE SURROUNDED BY A *CROWD* WATCHING ME.
ANYWAY, THERE'D BE *FOUR SUN* OF SHAVINGS.
WHOOSH! THE PILLAR WOULD BE *TWO KEN* LONG, AND I'D KEEP ON GOING WITHOUT STOPPING.

SWOOSH
WHOOSH
IT WAS THE SAME WHEN I SHARPENED MY FOUR-*SUN* PLANER.
IT WAS SMOOTHER THAN A WOMAN'S SKIN.
THE SHARPENING STONE HAD A *NASHIJI* FINISH THAT WAS ALMOST *STICKY*.

I'D PUSH AND PULL THE PLANER BLADE SLOWLY AND PRECISELY AGAINST IT.
THAT'S HOW I LIVED MY LIFE UP UNTIL TODAY. I DON'T WANT MY HEAD CUT OFF BY JUST *ANY OLD* BLADE.
THAT'S WHY I ONLY HAVE *TWO* REQUESTS. FIRST, I WANT TO SEE HOW WELL YOUR BLADE CUTS.
I CAN DETERMINE THE QUALITY OF *ANY* BLADE JUST BY *TOUCHING* IT.


THEN I WANT TO SEE HOW GOOD THE *GUY* USING THE BLADE IS. IF HIS ARMS AREN'T ANY GOOD, IT WON'T MATTER HOW GREAT HIS BLADE IS.
MY LIFE WAS ALL ABOUT *SHAVING*.
SO WHEN *I MYSELF* WILL BE "*SHAVED*," I WANT TO MAKE SURE IT'LL BE DONE *RIGHT* WITH MY OWN EYES.
I DON'T WANT TO DIE THINKING I'VE HAD MY HEAD "SHAVED" OFF WITH A *DULL* BLADE.
DID YOU HEAR MY REQUEST?

KICH

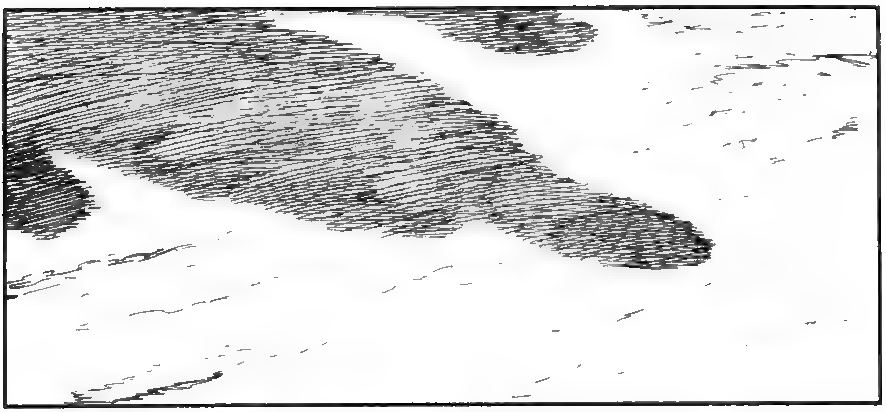
EXCELLENT. THERE'S *NO* DOUBT I'LL BE "SHAVED" WELL WITH *THIS*.
NOW SHOW ME WHAT *YOU* CAN DO.
ALL RIGHT, TRY CUTTING OFF ONE OF THOSE WILLOW BRANCHES.
NO.
HOW DO *YOU* TEST A PLANER THAT YOU'VE JUST SHARPENED?

YOU TEST IT BY SHAVING A *BOARD*, DON'T YOU?!
I DO THE SAME THING. IF *YOU* ARE AN ARTISAN WHO SHAVES *BOARDS*...
I AM AN ARTISAN WHO "SHAVES" *LIVES*.
I UNDERSTAND.
AN ARTISAN WHO "SHAVES" *LIVES*, HUH?
THOSE ARE GOOD WORDS TO *DIE* BY...

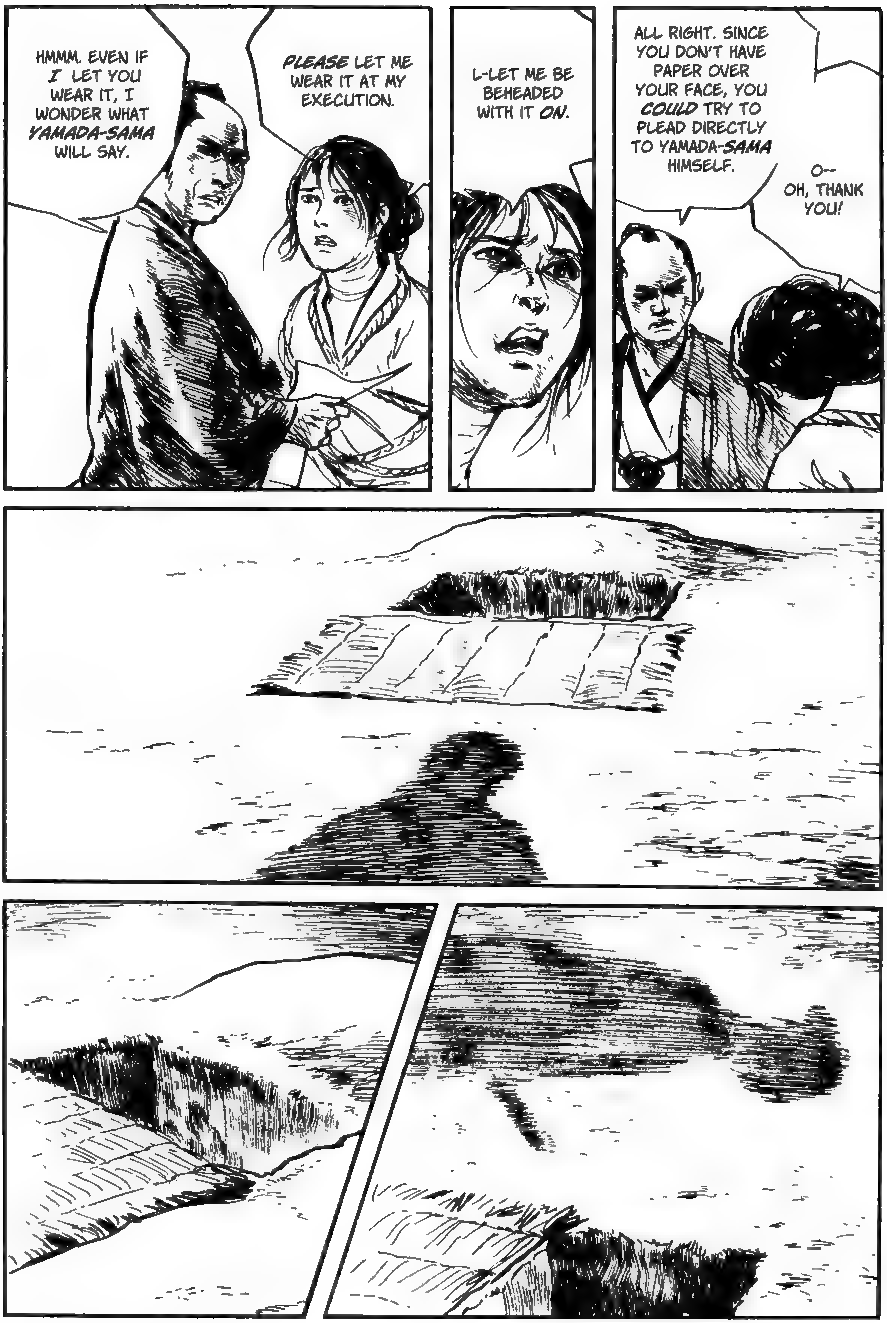
THEY'RE JUST RIGHT FOR ME.
BZHHH!

the forty-third

O-Rin the Wounded



TAKE THAT CLOTH OFF YOUR NECK.
PLEASE DON'T!
COULD YOU PLEASE LET ME WEAR IT?
I GOT THE WARDEN'S PERMISSION. I'VE NEVER TAKEN IT OFF UNTIL NOW.
YOU CAN'T WEAR THAT AT YOUR EXECUTION.
I-IN EXCHANGE I WON'T SCREAM. I'LL BEHAVE.
I WON'T CAUSE ANY TROUBLE. PLEASE.


HMMM. EVEN IF I LET YOU WEAR IT, I WONDER WHAT YAMADA-SAMA WILL SAY.
PLEASE LET ME WEAR IT AT MY EXECUTION.
L-LET ME BE BEHEADED WITH IT ON.
ALL RIGHT. SINCE YOU DON'T HAVE PAPER OVER YOUR FACE, YOU COULD TRY TO PLEAD DIRECTLY TO YAMADA-SAMA HIMSELF.
O-- OH, THANK YOU!

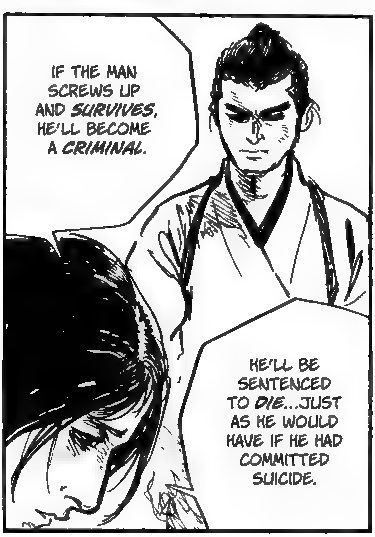
SNIP
I-I BEG YOU...
...P-PLEASE LET ME DIE WITH IT ON.

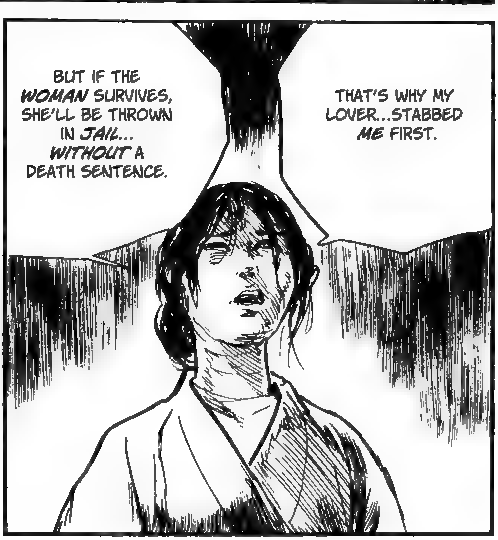
DO YOU MEAN THAT YOU DON'T WANT THAT CLOTH ON YOUR NECK REMOVED?
Y-YES... PLEASE, I BEG YOU.
THAT WILL DEPEND ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES. TELL ME WHY.
I... I...
...TRIED TO COMMIT SUICIDE WITH MY LOVER. I'VE ALREADY FACED DEATH ONCE.
TH-- THE PROOF'S ON MY NECK.

YOU'RE ABOUT TO DIE. YOU HAVE NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF. IF YOU ATONE FOR ALL THAT YOU HAVE DONE IN THIS WORLD, YOU WILL BE REBORN IN THE PURE LAND.
NO...I... ...I'M NOT ASHAMED OF MYSELF.
I...I SHAMED HIM... MY LOVER... TO HIS DEATH...AND I CAN'T BEAR IT.
TH-THAT MAN...
...IS MY ONE AND ONLY... ...IN THIS WORLD...
...AND THE NEXT.
I WAS A SLUT WITH A TAINTED BODY AND SOUL...
...BUT HE LOVED ME ANYWAY FROM THE BOTTOM OF HIS HEART.

HE WAS A REALLY *GOOD* PERSON.
WE WANTED TO BE *TOGETHER*, BUT THE BOSS OF HIS STORE WOULDN'T LET US...SO WE *ELOPED*...AND EVERYTHING SOON TURNED OUT AS EXPECTED.

MY LOVER WAS SO MEEK THAT HE COULDN'T KILL A *BUG*.
IT'S NORMAL IN A LOVE SUICIDE FOR THE MAN TO KILL THE WOMAN FIRST AND THEN KILL HIMSELF ONLY *AFTER* MAKING SURE SHE DIED. IF SHE HASN'T DIED, THEN HE CAN GET INTO ALL SORTS OF TROUBLE.


IF THE MAN SCREWS UP AND *SURVIVES*, HE'LL BECOME A *CRIMINAL*.
HE'LL BE SENTENCED TO *DIE*...JUST AS HE WOULD HAVE IF HE HAD COMMITTED SUICIDE.


BUT IF THE *WOMAN* SURVIVES, SHE'LL BE THROWN IN *JAIL*... *WITHOUT* A DEATH SENTENCE.
THAT'S WHY MY LOVER...STABBED *ME* FIRST.

AND THEN... HE MESSED UP
BOTH OF US SURVIVED AND WE WERE PILLORIED FOR THREE DAYS.
HOW CAN YOU CALL YOURSELF A MAN?!
YOU COULDN'T EVEN KILL ONE LADY!
GOT ANY BALLS OR WHAT?!
WHAT A DISGRACE!

WHO'D'VE EVER THOUGHT A LOVE SUICIDE COULD EVER END IN SUCH A SHAMEFUL WAY?!
SINCE YOU COULDN'T KILL HER FIRST, YOU SHOULDA LET *HER* KILL *YOU* INSTEAD!
HA HA HA

MY LOOOVE!
HE COULDN'T COMMIT A *LOVE* SUICIDE, BUT...
HE *COULD* KILL HIMSELF BY BITING HIS OWN TONGUE... I COULDN'T SAY ANYTHING...OR EVEN MAKE A SOUND.

AT THAT MOMENT, I THOUGHT...*I* KILLED HIM... THE SHAME WASN'T *MINE*... BUT *HIS*. HE DISGRACED *HIMSELF*...
THEN I WAS TOSSED INTO SHINAGAWA PRISON...AND IN THE END I BECAME A *THIEF*... AND COMMITTED CRIME AFTER CRIME...UP UNTIL TODAY...
OF COURSE I THOUGHT OVER AND OVER AGAIN THAT I'D DIE AFTER HIM...
BUT...HE DIDN'T DIE FOR ME. HE DIED BECAUSE OF HIS *OWN* DISGRACE.
IF I FOLLOWED HIM, I DIDN'T WANT TO DIE KNOWING...I'D DISGRACE HIM IN THE *NEXT* WORLD.
AND SO...
I DECIDED NEVER TO SHOW THIS SCAR TO ANYONE EVER AGAIN SO THAT I WOULDN'T DISGRACE HIM ANY MORE...

AND THAT'S WHY I'VE BEEN WEARING IT EVER SINCE.
YOU WANT TO MEET HIM AGAIN, DON'T YOU?
TH--THAT'LL BE...
YOU CAN TAKE THAT CLOTH OFF NOW.
HE'S WAITING FOR YOU IN THE NEXT WORLD. IF YOU DON'T TAKE IT OFF, HOW WILL HE KNOW THAT IT'S YOU?!
B-BUT...
EVEN AFTER YOU DIE...
THE MAN WAITING FOR YOU ON THE OTHER SIDE WILL RECOGNIZE THE SPIRIT OF THE WOMAN WHO NEVER SHOWED HER SCAR TO ANYONE.

TAKE IT OFF!

BZHHH!

the forty-fourth

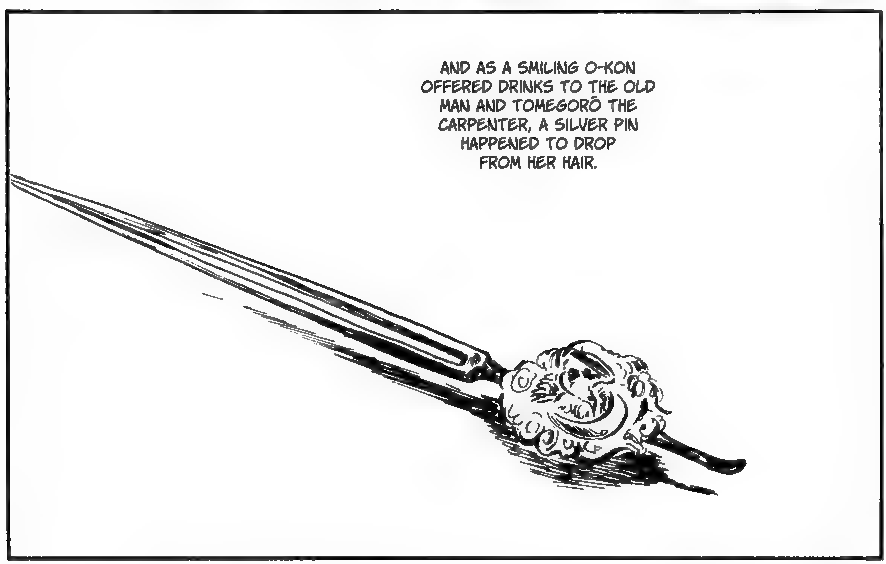
The Way of the Head

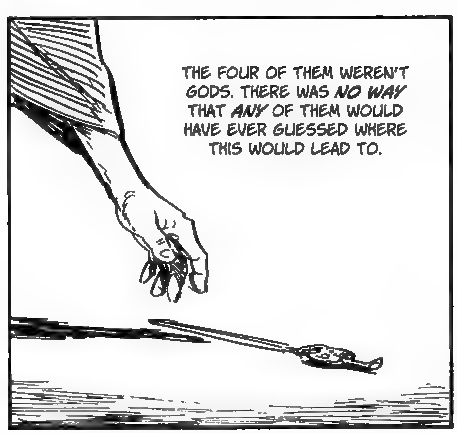
酒
SAKE

SAY, GIVE ME A HOT ONE.

YOU'RE ALWAYS SO COLORFUL, O-KON.
YOU SURE ARE SHARP, AREN'T YOU, OLD MAN?
ARE YOU TRYING TO MAKE A NAME FOR YOURSELF OUT OF MUD?
THAT'S A LOUSY PUN. I'VE HAD ENOUGH FROM YOU, TOME. IF YOU'RE GOING TO KEEP THAT UP, I'VE STILL GOT FOUR.
I DO, YOU KNOW.
YEAH, FOUR IN ONE YEAR.
YOU CAN MAKE STUFF OUT OF MUD, YOU KNOW!
I MEANT FOUR IN ONE NIGHT.
SPURT

TH-THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
I'M TALKING ABOUT THE LADY.
I CAN COME FOUR TIMES, BUT I CAN'T GET STIFF FOUR TIMES.
OH!
HA HA HA HA!
HEE HEE. LOOKS LIKE YOU LOST, TOME-SAN. HEE HEE.
HA HA. HE REALLY IS A SHARP GUY.
IT'S 'CAUSE HE'S REALLY GOOD AT TRICKING PEOPLE.


AND AS A SMILING O-KON OFFERED DRINKS TO THE OLD MAN AND TOMEGORŌ THE CARPENTER, A SILVER PIN HAPPENED TO DROP FROM HER HAIR.


THE FOUR OF THEM WEREN'T GODS. THERE WAS *NO WAY* THAT *ANY* OF THEM WOULD HAVE EVER GUESSED WHERE THIS WOULD LEAD TO.

THIS IS AMAZING. FINE CRAFTSMANSHIP.
LET ME LOOK AT IT.
HMMM... THIS IS EXCELLENT.
I HAD SAKICHI-SAN MAKE IT FOR ME. HE'S GOOD, ISN'T HE?
SAKICHI, HUH?
NOW I GET IT. IT HAD TO BE SAKICHI.
HE'S ONE OF ONLY A HANDFUL OF ORNAMENT-MAKERS IN EDO!
SAKICHI? THAT SAKICHI?
HUH, SAKICHI... HIM...

YOU MAKE IT SOUND LIKE SAKICHI MIGHT'VE BEEN YOUR AGE.
NOT JUST THE SAME AGE. WE USED TO *PLAY* WITH HIM WHEN WE WERE *KIDS!*
I HEAR HE'S STILL *SINGLE.*
WOMEN AREN'T EXACTLY *FLOCKING* TO HIM, ARE THEY?
HE MUST BE OVER *THIRTY.*
BY A *YEAR.*
SOME FRIEND YOU GUYS ARE. IF YOU WERE AS CLOSE TO HIM AS YOU SAY YOU ARE, YOU SHOULD BE FINDING HIM A BRIDE.
WE *THOUGHT* ABOUT IT, BUT HE'S A *MIDGET,* YOU KNOW.

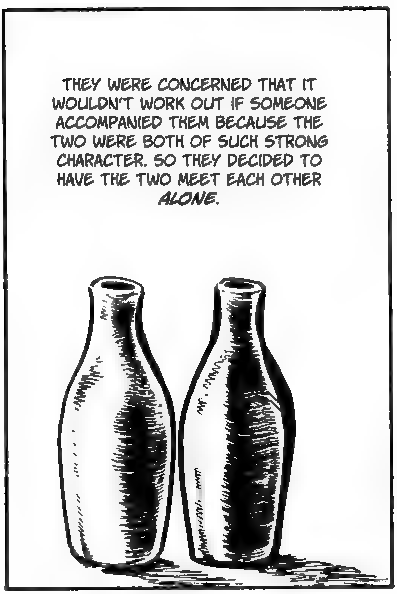
NAH, I GUESS YOU JUST COULD CALL HIM SHORT.
ANYWAY, ODDLY ENOUGH, THAT GUY'S FULL OF HIMSELF. HE'S REALLY VAIN ABOUT CERTAIN THINGS.
YEAH, IT'S 'CAUSE HE THINKS NOBODY'S BETTER THAN HIM!
HUH?
THAT EGOISTICAL, HUH?
THERE WAS A GIRL CALLED CHARCOAL KOMACHI.
SHE GOT HITCHED TWO OR THREE YEARS AGO. SHE WAS THE DAUGHTER OF A CHARCOAL WHOLESALER IN TOMIJIMA-CHO. PEOPLE SAID SHE WAS THE GREATEST BEAUTY IN ALL EDO.
AND THEN THERE WAS O-ITO.
YOU CAN GUESS WHAT HAPPENED WITH HER.
HA HA HA HA HA.
YOU MAY LAUGH, BUT HE WAS SERIOUS.
HE'D HAVE TO BE.

BUT IT MUST BE *HARD* FOR HIM TO BE THIRTY-ONE AND *STILL* BE SINGLE.
THAT'S WHY YOU GUYS *HAVE* TO HELP HIM OUT.
THE OLD MAN'S *RIGHT*, GUYS. YOU CAN TELL SAKICHI'S A HARD-WORKING, *SOLID* GUY. JUST LOOK AT WHAT *SKILL* HE HAS.
IT'D BE A *WASTE* FOR HIM TO REMAIN A BACHELOR!
AND WHAT ABOUT *YOU*, O-KON?
OH, *ME*?
DO *YOU* HAVE A HUSBAND?
THOUGHT NOT. I GUESSED *RIGHT*. I SAW STRAIGHT *THROUGH* YOU. HEH HEH.
WHAT ABOUT THE GIRL WHO LOST HER MOTHER AT THE END OF LAST YEAR? SHE'S LIVING *ALONE* NOW.
SHE'S IN THE KONOE-YA LONG-HOUSE.

YOU SAID HER NAME WAS O-SAKI-SAN OR SOMETHING, RIGHT?
OH, THE O-SAKI IN THE HOTEI LONGHOUSE. THE ONE WHO'S REALLY GOOD WITH A NEEDLE...
YES, YES, THAT O-SAKI-SAN.
SHE'S GOT GOOD CHARACTER, AND HER NEEDLE'S GOT A FINE REPUTATION.
O-SAKI... -SAN, RIGHT?
SHE'S NOT JUST TOO TALL...
SHE'S UGLY...
SHHH.
HEH HEH HEH HEH.
O-SAKI-SAN MUST BE TWENTY-ONE OR TWENTY-TWO
SHE MAY BE TALL, BUT WOULDN'T THAT MAKE THEM THE PERFECT COUPLE?
YEAH, I GUESS IT WOULD. HEH HEH HEH HEH.

DOES SAKICHI KNOW O-SAKI-*SAN*?
THERE'S NO REASON HE WOULD.

AND SO THE CONVERSATION TOOK THIS TURN AND THAT UNTIL IT ARRIVED AT AN INEVITABLE CONCLUSION: THEY SHOULD TRY TO GET THE TWO TOGETHER.


THEY WERE CONCERNED THAT IT WOULDN'T WORK OUT IF SOMEONE ACCOMPANIED THEM BECAUSE THE TWO WERE BOTH OF SUCH STRONG CHARACTER. SO THEY DECIDED TO HAVE THE TWO MEET EACH OTHER *ALONE*.

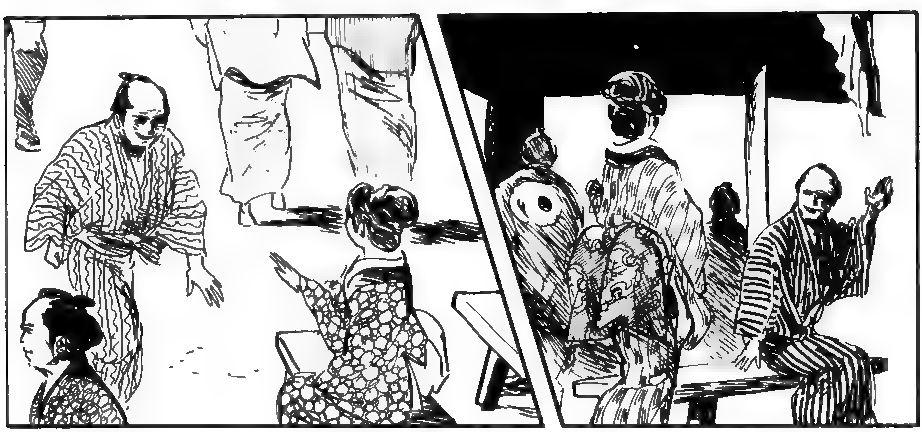
THE PLACE: THE IROHA TEAHOUSE IN FRONT OF KANNÓ TEMPLE.
THE TIME: THE SEVENTH HOUR (4 PM).

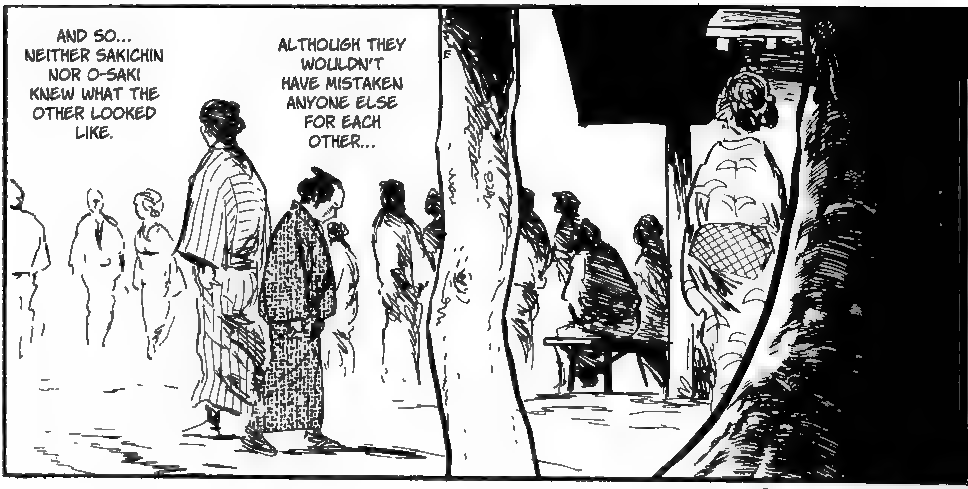
ORNAMENTS BY SAKICHI
TINK
TINK
TINK
HEY, SAKICHI. THE GIRL'S NAME IS O-SAKI-SAN.
SHE'S WELL KNOWN FOR HER GOOD CHARACTER. SHE'S NEVER ACCEPTED ANY PROPOSALS UP UNTIL NOW.
SHE HAD BEEN TAKING CARE OF HER MOTHER, WHO PASSED AWAY AT THE END OF LAST YEAR.

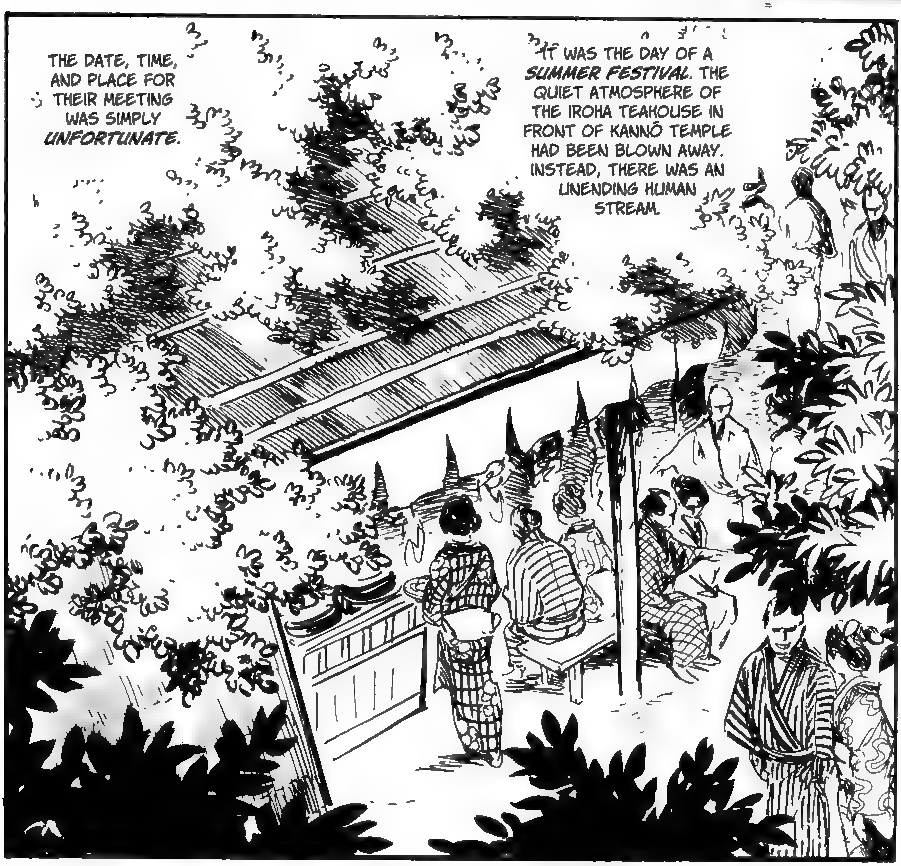
AND SHE'S GREAT WITH A NEEDLE. SHE'S ALWAYS LINING UP WORK--SO MUCH THAT SHE CAN'T SLEEP!
THE OLD MAN IN KAYA-CHŌ THINKS YOU'D MAKE THE PERFECT COUPLE!
THE OLD MAN, HUH?
HOW ABOUT IT? WHY DON'T YOU TRY TO MEET HER?
YOU CAN GO MEET HER BY YOURSELF. SHE'LL BE COMING ALONE TOO.

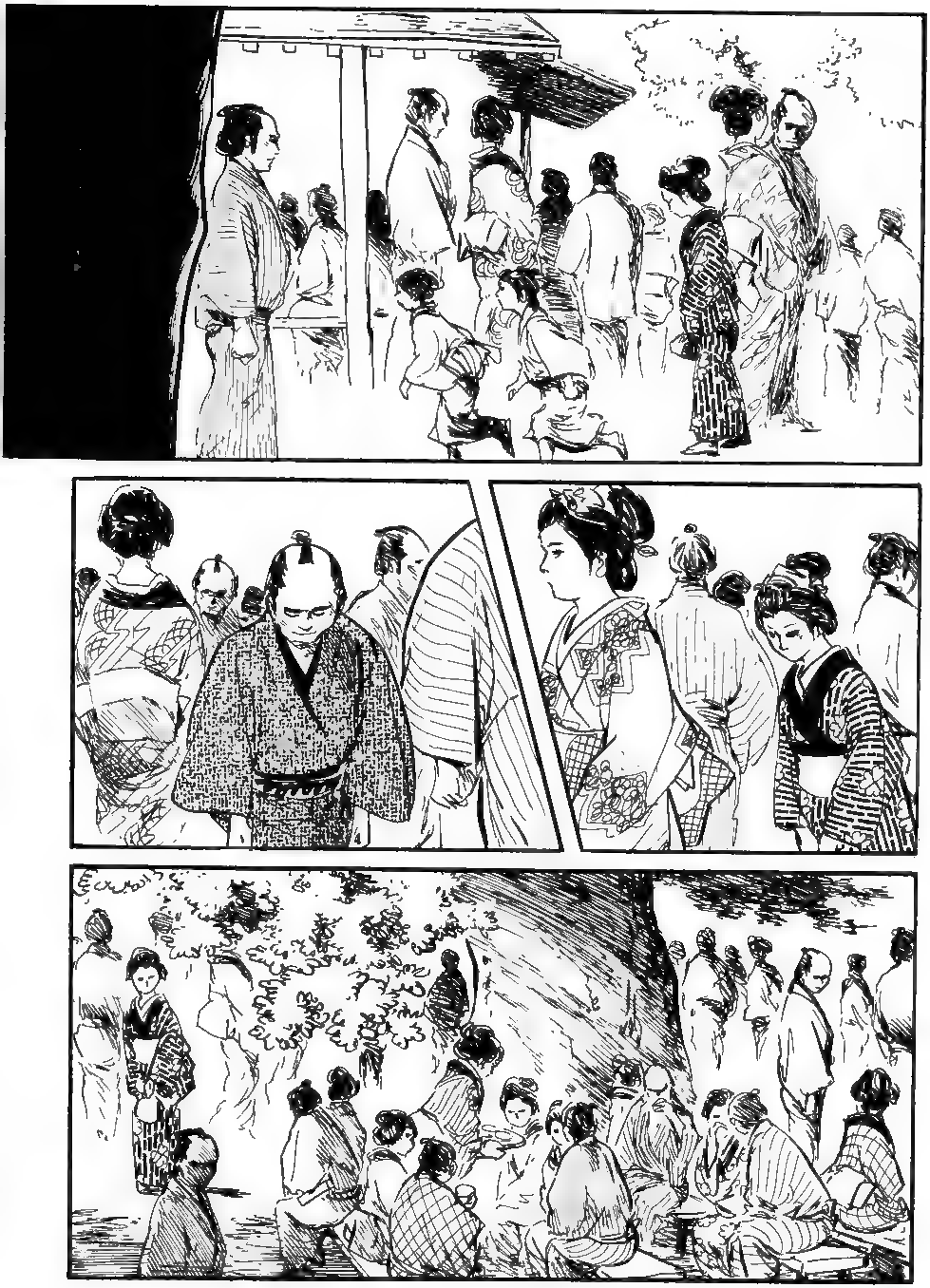
お針子仕事
NEEDLE PIECEWORK
SO, O-SAKI-SAN, SAKICHI'S COMING OUT BY HIMSELF. I'M NOT COMING WITH HIM, AND NEITHER IS THE OLD MAN.
SINCE YOU DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER, IF YOU DON'T LIKE HIM, YOU CAN JUST GO HOME AND IT'LL BE FINE.
NOTHING'S GOING TO HAPPEN IF YOU TURN HIM DOWN. NO ONE'LL BE OFFENDED.

WELL, THIS WAY YOU WON'T HURT HER. IT'S BECAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW EACH OTHER.
IT'S A TEAHOUSE, SO LOTS OF WOMEN WILL BE GOING IN AND OUT. BUT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SPOT HER.
IT'LL BE OBVIOUS THAT SHE'S THE WOMAN FOR YOU.
TINK
TINK
TINK
TINK....

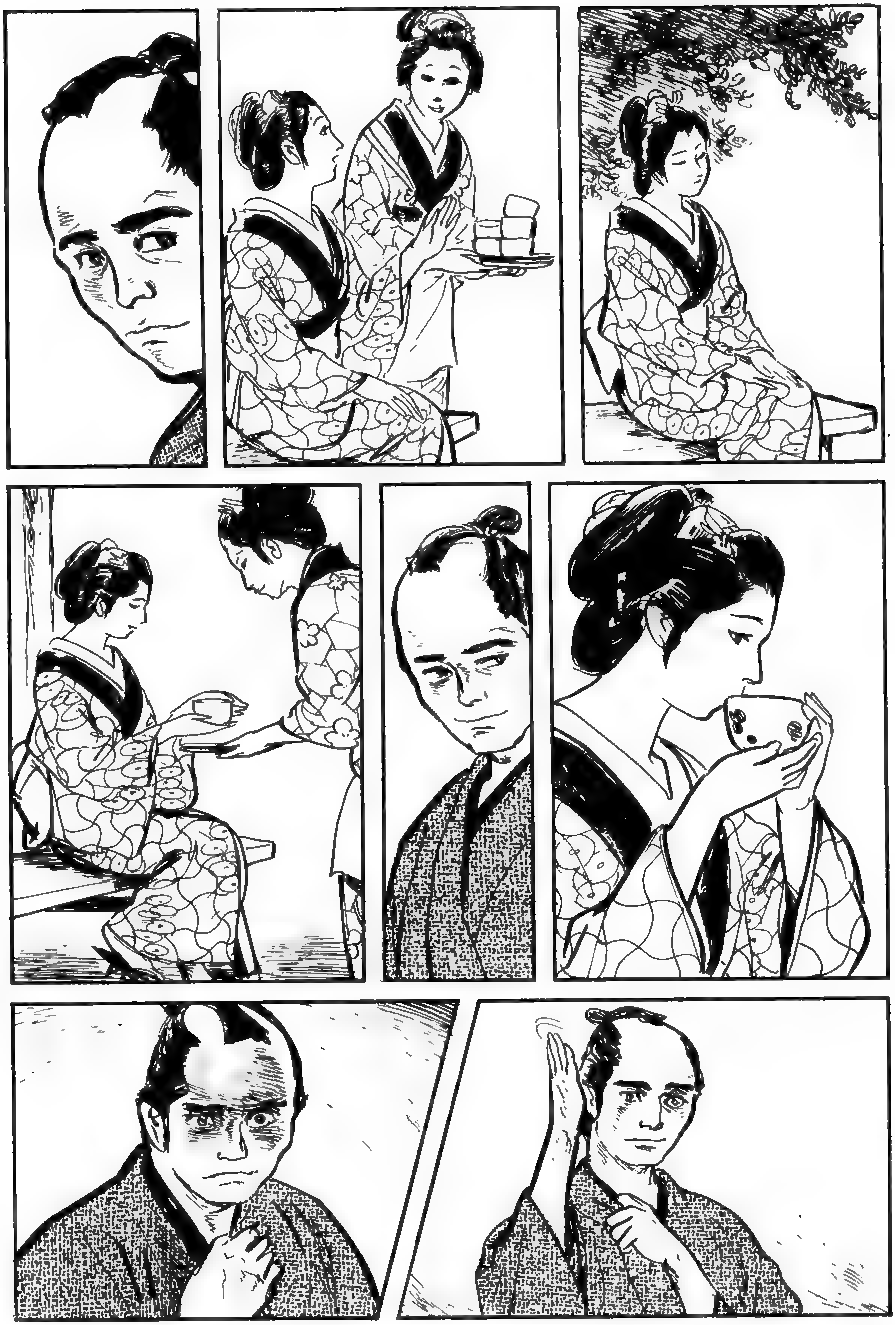


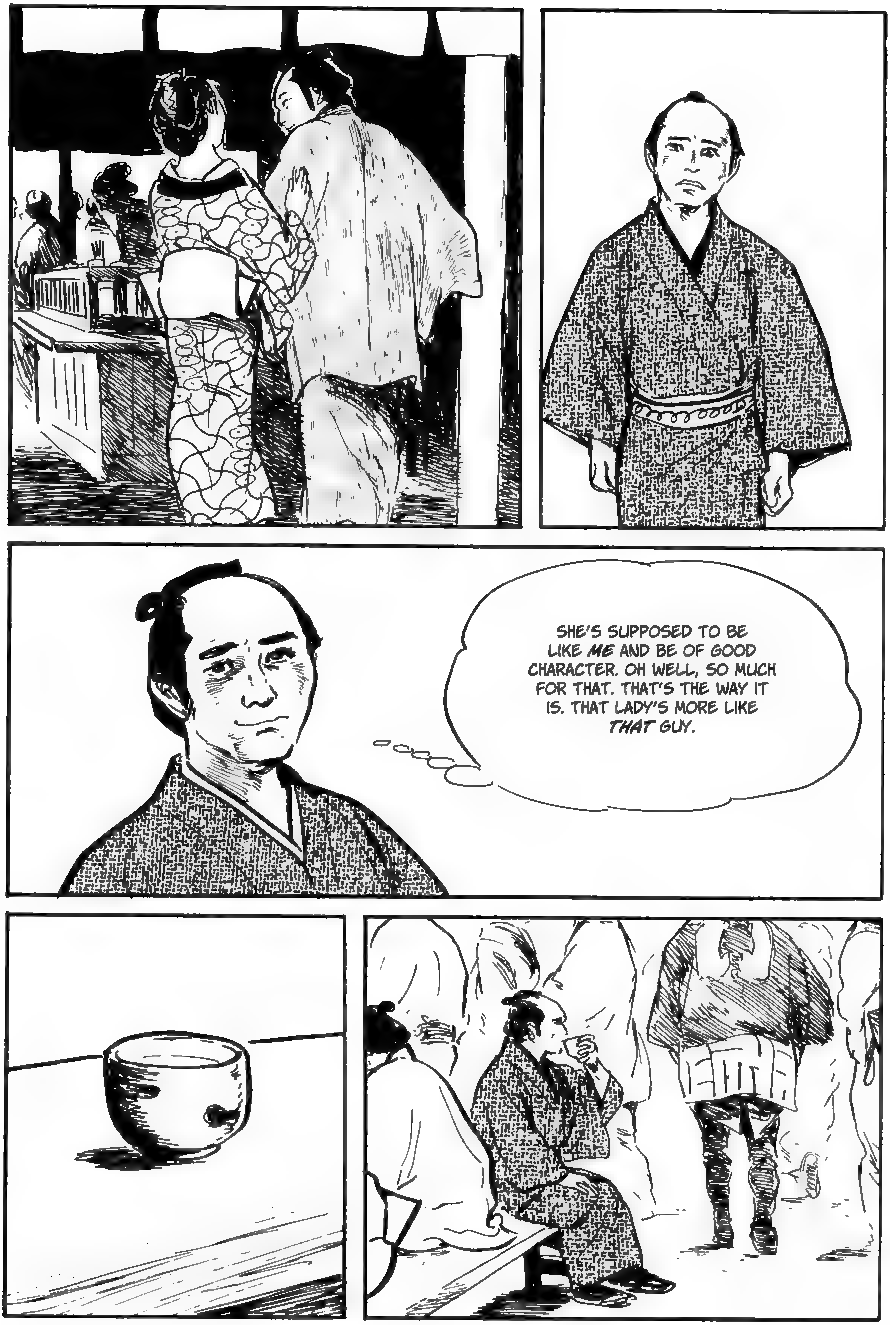

AND SO... NEITHER SAKICHIN NOR O-SAKI KNEW WHAT THE OTHER LOOKED LIKE.
ALTHOUGH THEY WOULDN'T HAVE MISTAKEN ANYONE ELSE FOR EACH OTHER...

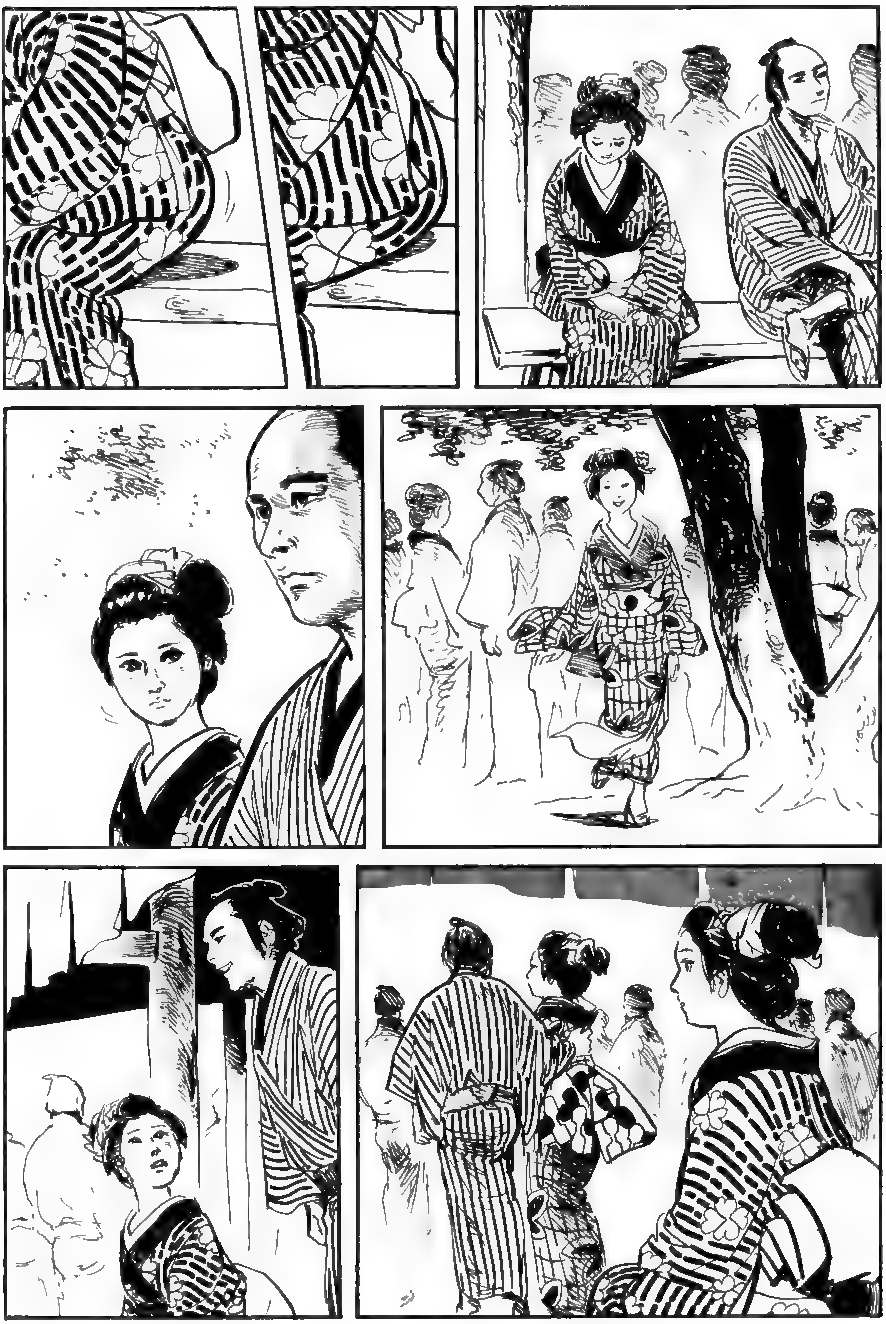

THE DATE, TIME, AND PLACE FOR THEIR MEETING WAS SIMPLY *UNFORTUNATE*.
IT WAS THE DAY OF A *SUMMER FESTIVAL*. THE QUIET ATMOSPHERE OF THE IROHA TEAHOUSE IN FRONT OF KANNŌ TEMPLE HAD BEEN BLOWN AWAY. INSTEAD, THERE WAS AN UNENDING HUMAN STREAM.

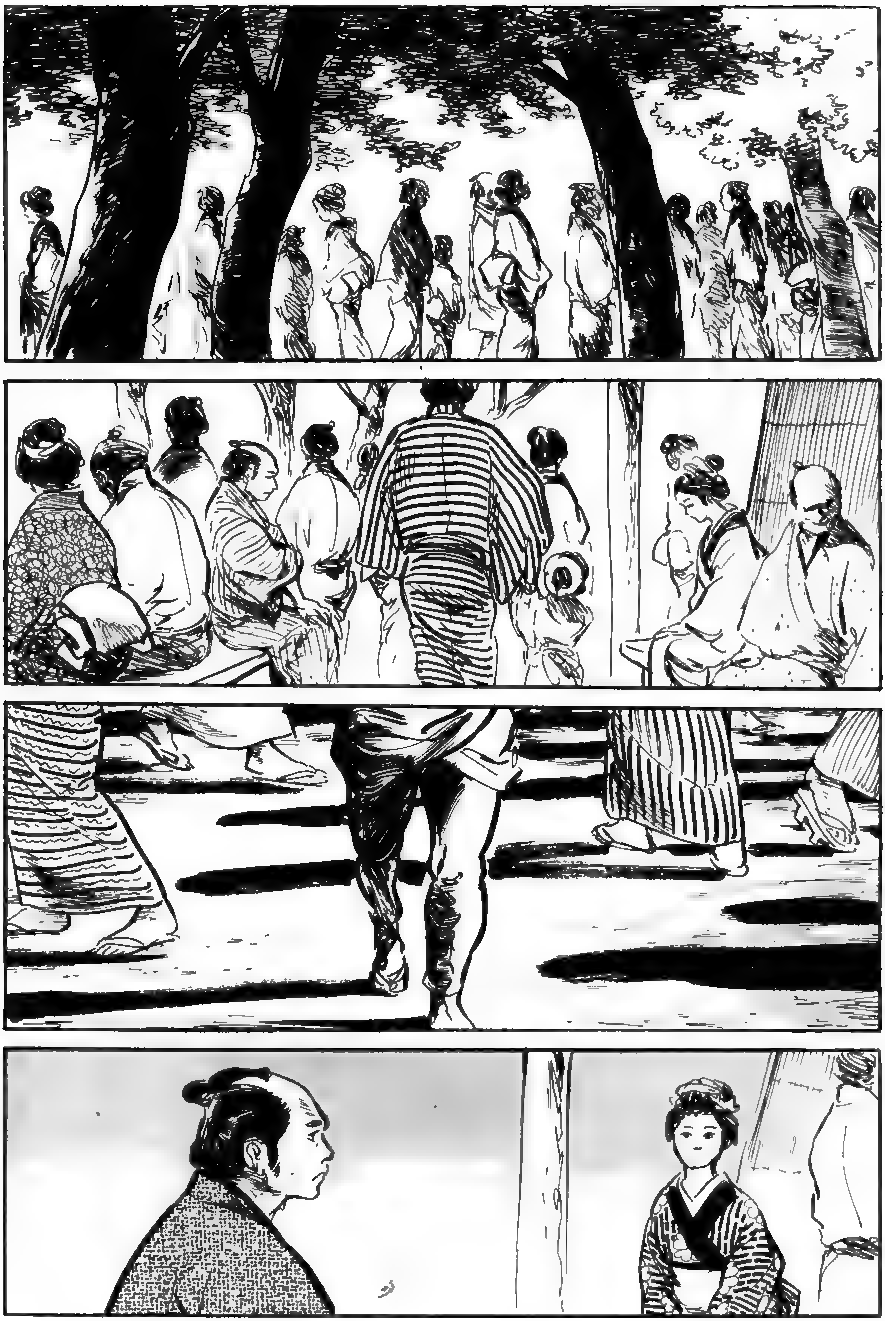


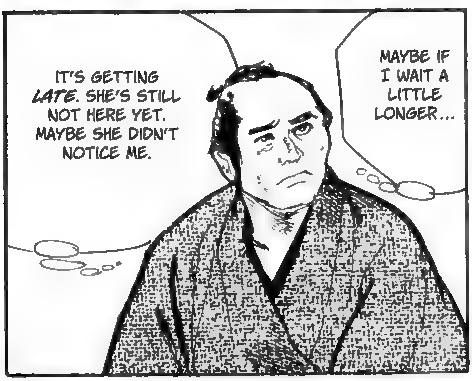
WHAT MADE THINGS EVEN WORSE WAS THAT THE MATCHMAKERS HAD TOLD BOTH SAKICHI AND O-SAKI THAT THEY *RESEMBLED* EACH OTHER.



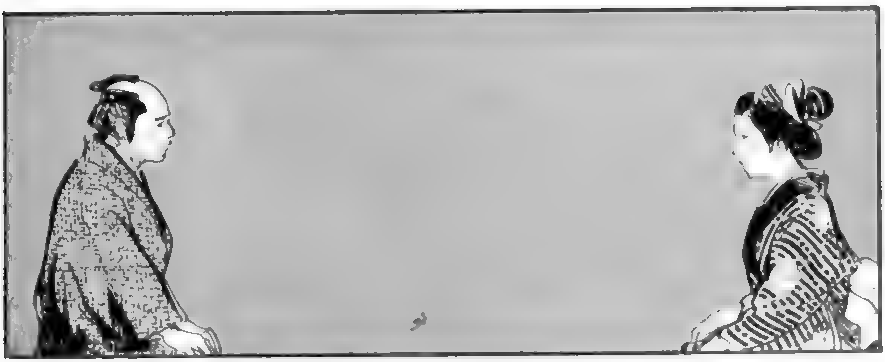

SHE'S SUPPOSED TO BE LIKE *ME* AND BE OF GOOD CHARACTER. OH WELL, SO MUCH FOR THAT. THAT'S THE WAY IT IS. THAT LADY'S MORE LIKE *THAT* GUY.






IT'S GETTING *LATE*. SHE'S STILL NOT HERE YET. MAYBE SHE DIDN'T NOTICE ME.
MAYBE IF I WAIT A LITTLE LONGER...

IT'S GETTING *LATE*. IT'S POSSIBLE THAT HE DIDN'T SEE ME IN THE CROWD, BUT...



THAT LADY'S BEEN WAITING FOR A GUY WHO'LL NEVER COME. PROBABLY GOT *JILTED*...
THAT GUY'S *LOST IN THOUGHT*. HE'S BEEN WAITING SO LONG. PROBABLY FOR A *PROSTITUTE*...

IT CAN'T BE...
C-COULD... THAT GUY...?
NO... EVERYONE WHO'D BEEN RECOMMENDED TO ME BEFORE... WASN'T ANYTHING LIKE HIM.

A HOMELY LADY LIKE *HER*? THEY'VE GOTTA BE KIDDING.
THE OLD MAN IN KAYA-CHŌ SAID SHE WAS LIKE *ME*. THERE'S *NO WAY* THAT COULD BE *HER*.
BUT THAT LADY HASN'T BUDGED *AT ALL*.
NO ONE'S *EVER* GOING TO COME TO HIM. SO HOW MUCH LONGER IS HE GOING TO WAIT?

SPLASH

GUESS I'LL GO *HOME*.
OH WELL, IT'S OKAY. I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE DOING THIS FROM THE BEGINNING ANYWAY.
I JUST CAME OUT TO SAVE THE OLD MAN'S FACE, THAT'S ALL.
IT WAS SO CROWDED TODAY...
...THAT HE *COULDN'T* HAVE NOTICED ME...
...MAYBE...
WHAT IF THAT WOMAN *DID* SEE ME?
MAYBE SHE FELT *AWKWARD* AND TRIED *NOT* TO STAND OUT.

THAT HAS TO BE CASE.
THAT DAMN TOME. I DIDN'T HEAR A THING ABOUT THAT WOMAN FROM HIM.
BUT WOMEN CAN HEAR A LOT ABOUT ME.
MAYBE SHE WAS REALLY SHY.
AND OF COURSE, THERE WAS THE WAY THIS MEETING WAS ARRANGED.
THEY THOUGHT NEITHER OF US WOULD BE HURT THIS WAY, REGARDLESS OF WHO TURNED DOWN WHOM.
OF COURSE...

THAT MAN MUST HAVE KEPT HIS PROMISE TO COME HERE.
HE MUST HAVE COME TO SEE ME. HE MUST'VE.
HE MUST'VE HEARD A LOT ABOUT ME.
AS AN ORNAMENT MAKER, HE MUST BE COOPED UP INSIDE ALL THE TIME... MAYBE HE'S NAIVE AND SHY.
AND THAT'S WHY...

MAYBE THAT WOMAN WILL HAVE SOMEONE GIVE ME A MESSAGE...
...SAYING THAT WE'LL *DEFINITELY* MEET *NEXT* TIME.

AND THAT'LL MEAN SHE *LIKES* ME.
THAT LADY WAS *CUTE* WHEN SHE SMILED...
LOOKS LIKE *NEITHER* OF US MET THE PEOPLE WE WERE WAITING FOR.
IT'S JUST *WRONG* TO KEEP A *PURE, NICE* WOMAN LIKE THAT WAITING.

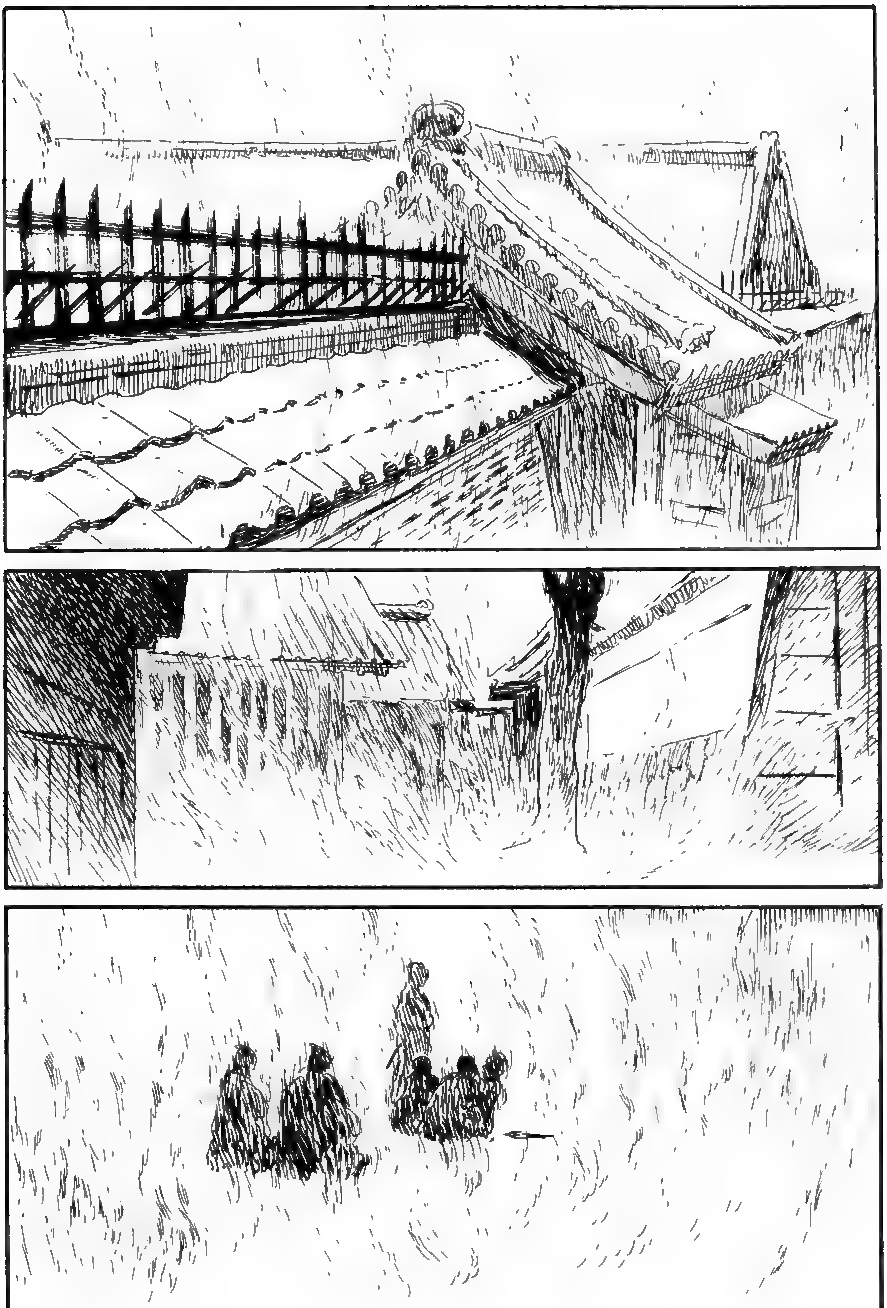
MAYBE HE'LL GET A GO-BETWEEN TO SAY SOMETHING TO ME LATER.
WHAT'LL I DO IF HE DOES? I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM.
MAYBE I'LL TELL HIM I'D LIKE TO MEET HIM AGAIN.
HEH HEH.
WHO'D KEEP AN HONEST, NICE MAN LIKE HIM WAITING?

SO WHAT HAPPENED?
I HAVEN'T THE FAINTEST IDEA.

SAKICHI SAID THAT HE *DID* GO OUT BUT *SHE* DIDN'T SHOW UP.
AND WHAT'S ODD IS THAT O-SAKI SAID THAT SHE *DID* GO OUT.
OH MY!
THEY HAD NEVER SEEN EACH OTHER BEFORE, SO THEY DIDN'T RECOGNIZE EACH OTHER.
THAT *CAN'T* BE.
THE IROHA TEAHOUSE IS WHERE MEN AND WOMEN GET TOGETHER.
IF A MAN AND WOMAN ARE BY THEMSELVES THERE, THEY'D BE ABLE TO SPOT EACH OTHER. EVEN A LITTLE *KID* COULD DO *THAT*!
MAYBE THEY *DID* SEE EACH OTHER, BUT THEY *DIDN'T* LIKE WHAT THEY SAW.

THAT'S ALL I CAN THINK OF.
WHAT'S SAKICHI DOING NOW?
WORKING AS USUAL.
O-SAKI-SAN TOO.
INK INK

IT WASN'T
MEANT
TO BE.



DO YOU HAVE ANY LAST WORDS?
SAKICHI, DON'T YOU HAVE ANY LAST WORDS?
UM, ER... NO, I DON'T HAVE ANY...

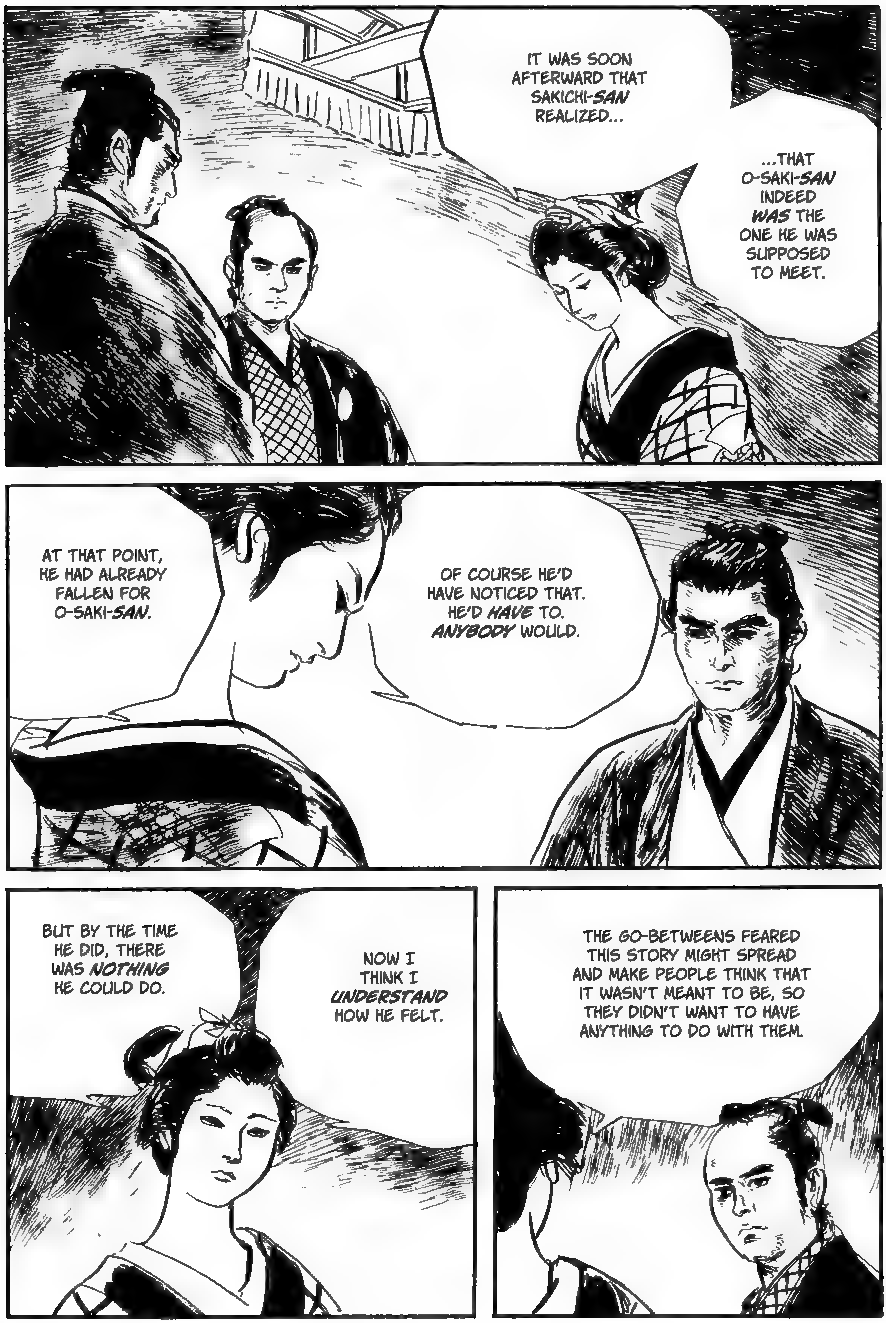
JUST...
JUST *WHAT*?!
UH, IT'S *EASY* TO MAKE THE CHINESE CHARACTER FOR "*ROAD*" OUT OF THE CHARACTER FOR "*HEAD*." ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS ADD A *SHINNYŪ*.
WHY DO YOU SAY *THAT*?
BECAUSE I NOTICED THAT MEN WALK UPON THE *ROAD OF THE HEAD* FROM THE DAY THEY ARE BORN. TO *LIVE* IS TO RISK ONE'S OWN *LIFE*.
BUT A HEAD CANNOT FORM A ROAD ALONE. IT ALSO CAN'T *WALK* ALONE. THAT'S WHY THE HEAD CHARACTER NEEDS A *SHINNYŪ* TO SUPPORT IT...
WOMEN ARE OUR *SHINNYŪ*.
IF A MAN CAN FIND THE *SHINNYŪ* MATCHING HIS OWN HEAD, THEN HE CAN LIVE A *FULL* LIFE.

BUT IF A MAN CAN'T FIND SUCH A WOMAN...
...THEN HE'LL END UP JUST LIKE ME, SITTING RIGHT HERE, ABOUT TO LOSE HIS HEAD!
ANYWAY, IN MY CASE, MY SHINNYU GOT TAKEN AWAY FROM MY HEAD.
HEH HEH HEE HEE HEE HEE.
EVEN I DIDN'T HAVE A SHINNYU... UNTIL SHE CAME ALONG...
SHE WAS JUST RIGHT FOR ME...WITH SUCH A CUTE SMILE...
SHE'D ALWAYS BE THE APPLE OF MY EYE...
HEE HEE HEE HEE.
BUT I COULDN'T, SO...
...IF ONLY I COULD HAVE LIVED WITH HER...

...IN THE END... HEE HEE HEE HEE.
BZHHHH
HEE HEE HEE

SO... THAT'S...
...WHAT SAKICHI-SAN DID...?
MAYBE WE MADE A TERRIBLE MISTAKE.

MAYBE WE *SHOULDN'T* HAVE TRIED TO GET THOSE TWO TOGETHER.
WE SHOULD'VE SET UP A *PROPER* MEETING.
BUT... IF WE HAD DONE *THAT*, IT WOULD HAVE *FAILED*.
EVEN SO, IF YOU CONSIDER THAT SAKICHI-*SAN* WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN EXECUTED, THEN MAYBE THAT *WOULD* HAVE BEEN BETTER....

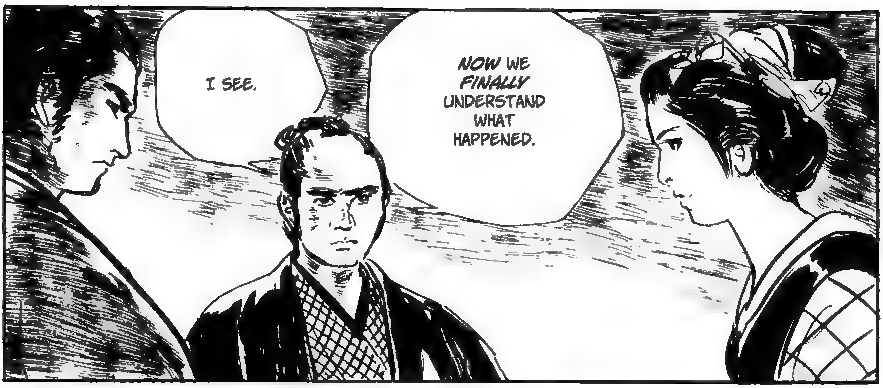

IT WAS SOON AFTERWARD THAT SAKICHI-SAN REALIZED...
...THAT O-SAKI-SAN INDEED WAS THE ONE HE WAS SUPPOSED TO MEET.
AT THAT POINT, HE HAD ALREADY FALLEN FOR O-SAKI-SAN.
OF COURSE HE'D HAVE NOTICED THAT. HE'D HAVE TO. ANYBODY WOULD.
BUT BY THE TIME HE DID, THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO.
NOW I THINK I UNDERSTAND HOW HE FELT.
THE GO-BETWEENS FEARED THIS STORY MIGHT SPREAD AND MAKE PEOPLE THINK THAT IT WASN'T MEANT TO BE, SO THEY DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THEM.

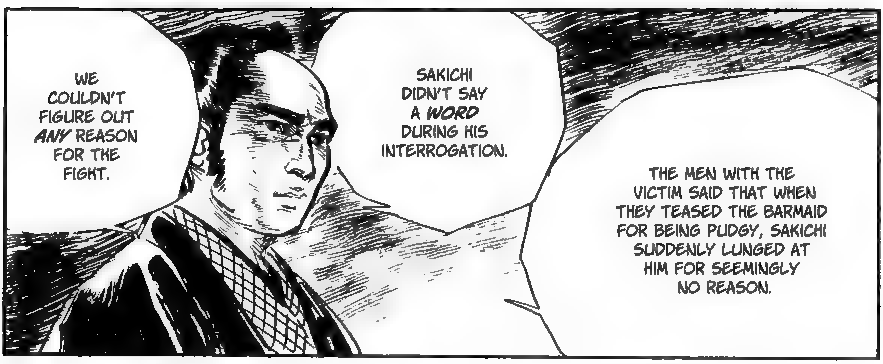
CONVERSELY, SAKICHI-SAN WANTED TO HAVE THEM EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENED SOMEHOW, BUT AS PROUD AS HE WAS, HE DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO BRING UP THE SUBJECT, AND HE COULDN'T GO SEE O-SAKI-SAN DIRECTLY.
HIS FEELINGS FOR O-SAKI-SAN JUST GOT STRONGER AND STRONGER.
THAT'S WHAT I THINK. SO OF COURSE HE CAME TO THINK OF O-SAKI-SAN AS A WONDERFUL WOMAN, AND SHE CONQUERED HIS HEART...
HE HAD NEVER BEEN SO IRRITATED BEFORE. HE COULDN'T PUT HIS THOUGHTS INTO WORDS.

AND SINCE SAKICHI-*SAN* WAS A *PROUD* MAN WITH A ONE-TRACK MIND, HE JUST KEPT GETTING *WORSE*.
WORSE YET, THIS WAS ALL *OUR* FAULT. OUR SCHEME HAD *BACKFIRED*.
OUR MISTAKE HAD CAUSED HIM TO GET *DRUNK* AND TO GO *BERSERK*.
THAT'S WHY WE STARTED SAYING BAD THINGS ABOUT O-SAKI-*SAN* TO HIM.
TOMEGORŌ OR SOMEBODY TOLD HIM THAT THEY DIDN'T KNOW HOW *UGLY* SHE WAS.
THEY TRIED TO SAY ALL SORTS OF THINGS TO MAKE HIM FEEL BETTER.
"YOU'RE A GOOD-LOOKING MAN," THEY SAID. "THERE'S NO *WAY* THAT WOMAN COULD BE A MATCH FOR *YOU*!"

BUT I THINK THEIR EFFORTS JUST LEFT HIM EVEN *MORE* UNABLE TO EXPRESS HIS TRUE FEELINGS...
HE'D GET *REALLY* DRUNK. IT'D BE AS IF HE'D BECOME *ANOTHER* PERSON. HE'D GET INTO A *LOT* OF *FIGHTS*...

AND SO IT WAS SOMETHING *SO* SMALL THAT IN THE END CAUSED HIM TO *KILL* A MAN...
WE DIDN'T REALIZE WHAT HAD BEEN GOING ON... UNTIL IT WAS *TOO LATE*.


I SEE.
NOW WE FINALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENED.


WE COULDN'T FIGURE OUT ANY REASON FOR THE FIGHT.
SAKICHI DIDN'T SAY A WORD DURING HIS INTERROGATION.
THE MEN WITH THE VICTIM SAID THAT WHEN THEY TEASED THE BARMAID FOR BEING PUDGY, SAKICHI SUDDENLY LUNGED AT HIM FOR SEEMINGLY NO REASON.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN ...THE RESULTS CAN BE TERRIFYING.

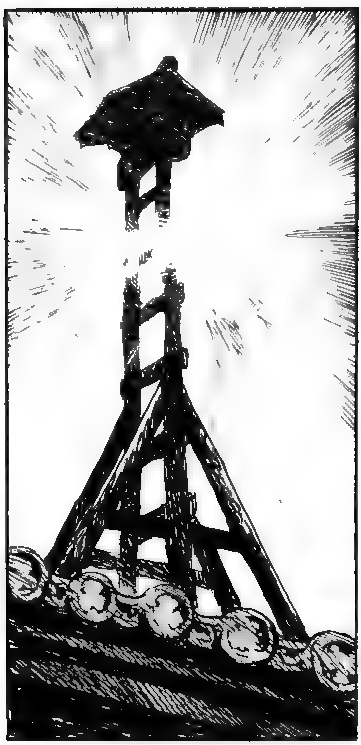
IF ONLY MY PIN... HADN'T FALLEN AT THAT MOMENT...

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO O-SAKI-SAN?
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT HAPPENED TO HER AFTER SHE MET SAKICHI-SAN....

I CAN ONLY THINK SHE SURELY DIDN'T LIKE HIM..
...EVEN THOUGH THEY'D BE *SUCH* A GREAT MATCH... A GREAT MATCH ..
THE WAY OF THE HEAD...?

the forty-fifth

Shinko's Thirst



MEEEN
MEEEN

MEEEN
MEEEN
SHHH
SHHH
MEEEN
MEEEN
DJEE DJEE
OTONE RAT HILL GOT ITS NAME FROM THE "VALLEY OF THE RATS" HERE.
MEEEN
MEEEN
MEEEN
THERE WERE A LOT OF PROSTITUTES FURTHER DOWN.
DJEE
DJEE
MEEEN
MEEEN
I CAN'T STAND IT!

EVEN MY JITTE'S SWEATY!
GET UP! THIS IS THE POLICE.

KIYO-SAMA'S

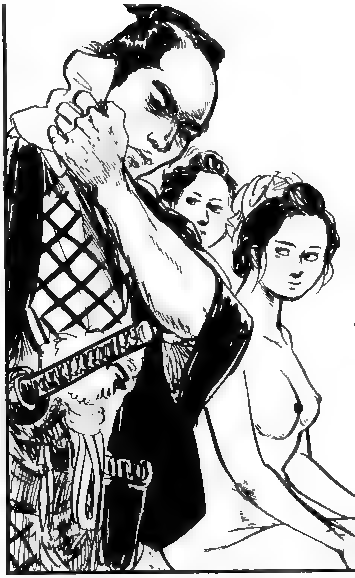
CAN YOU STAND THE *HEAT*, SIR?
YEAH.
IT'S SO *HOT*, YET YOU'RE WORKING *SO* HARD.
OH, SIR!

YOU'RE DOING *SUCH* A GREAT JOB.
WHAT CAN WE DO FOR YOU?
I NEED TO ASK YOU SOME *QUESTIONS*.
THERE'S *NO* USE IN HIDING HIM.
WE WOULDN'T LIE TO *YOU*, SIR.
I'VE NEVER SEEN *THAT* FACE BEFORE.
ME NEITHER. NOT *THAT* GUY. NOT *EVER*...
WHAT ABOUT YOUR *LONG-TERM GUESTS*?
WE DON'T HAVE ANY. BUSINESS ISN'T GOING WELL THESE DAYS.

JUST TO BE SURE, I'D LIKE TO ASK SOME OTHER PEOPLE.
COME THIS WAY, PLEASE.

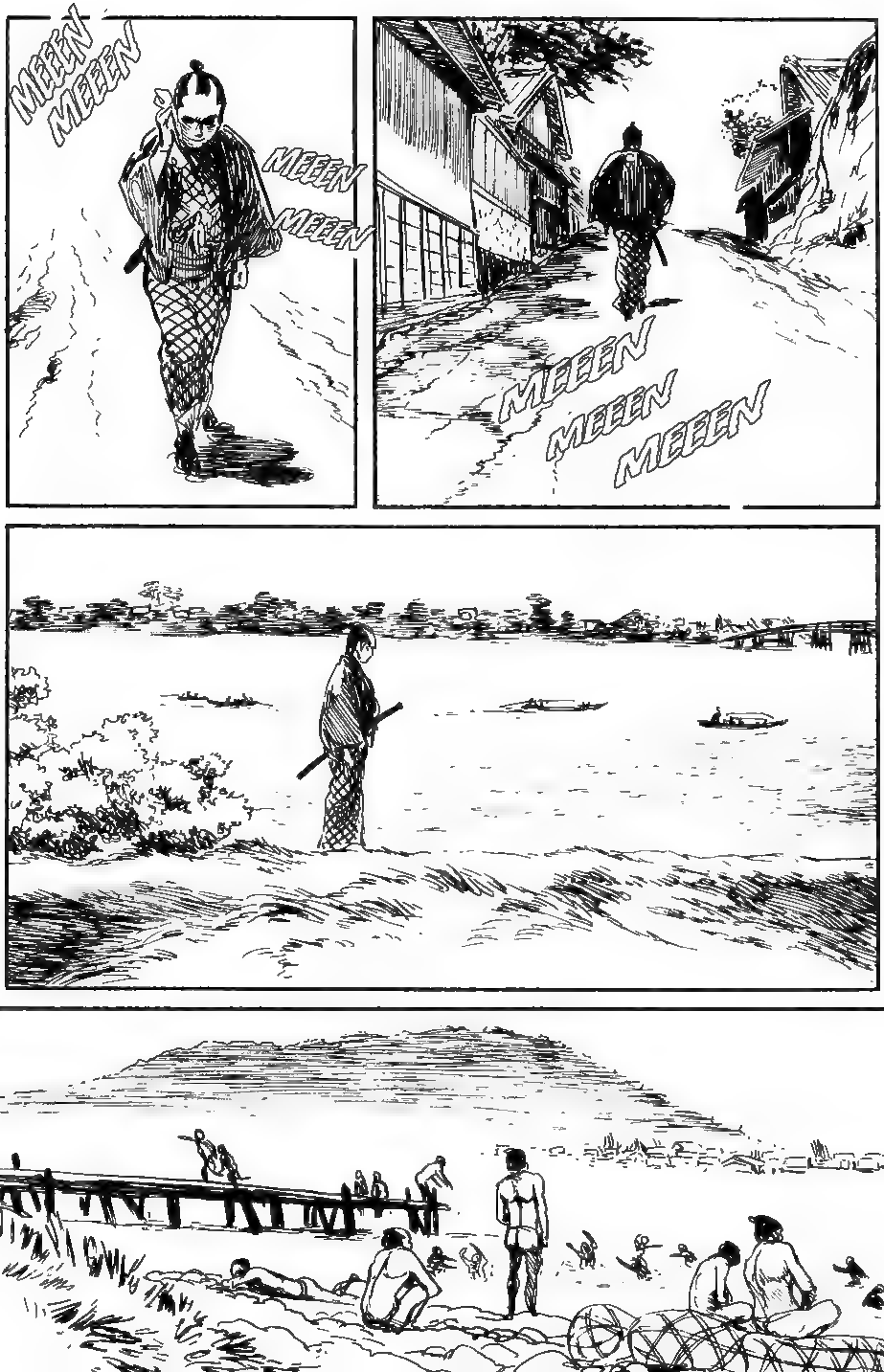
COULD YOU LET ME USE SOME OF YOUR WATER?

YOU BITCH! GIVE HIM SOME CLEAN WATER!
I DON'T CARE.
I JUST WANT TO WIPE OFF SOME SWEAT.



SORRY I BOTHERED YOU.

THANK YOU, SIR.


MEEEN
MEEEN
MEEEN
MEEEN
MEEEN
MEEEN
MEEEN

CAN'T STAND IT...
CAN I SWIM?
NO.
I'LL DO IT WHERE NO ONE CAN SEE ME.
NO, THERE IS NO SUCH PLACE.
IT'S SO HOT. I'M DYING!
GO TAKE A BATH!

EVER SINCE I WAS BORN, I'VE GONE SWIMMING EVERY SUMMER.
IT'S AS IF THE RIVER IS CALLING OUT TO ME.
BUT YOU'RE NOT SHINKO THE KAPPA ANYMORE. YOU'RE MY WIFE.
YOU BELONG TO ME — CONSTABLE KASANE KASAJIRŌ OF HATCHŌBORI!
BUT...
SHUT UP. SAY YES. YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO SAY YES.

坂根
I'M HOME!

GET UP!

SHINKO!
DAMN YOU, GET UP!
OW!
I-IT HURTS!
YOU LITTLE--
SLAP!

WHAT'RE YOU DOING?!
SHADDUP! TODAY YOU'VE PUSHED ME TO THE LIMIT!
I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!
WHOMP!
NOW YOU'VE DONE IT, KASAJIRO!
YOU FOOL! IS THAT HOW YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO TALK TO YOUR HUSBAND?!
I'M A JIKISAN, AND YOU'RE MY WIFE!

WHEN ARE YOU GONNA CLEAN UP YOUR ACT?!
YOU ALWAYS GET YOUR WAY, NO MATTER WHAT YOU SAY. YOU WERE BORN A JIKISAN.
BUT IN THE END, I'M JUST A LOWLY NOBODY. JUST A SLUT IN THE GUTTER.
I DUNNO WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO-- OR TO SAY!
AND THEN THERE'S MY TATTOO.
NOTHING'S EVER GONNA MAKE IT GO AWAY! SO HOW ABOUT THAT, HUH?!
SHINKO! YOU BITCH!

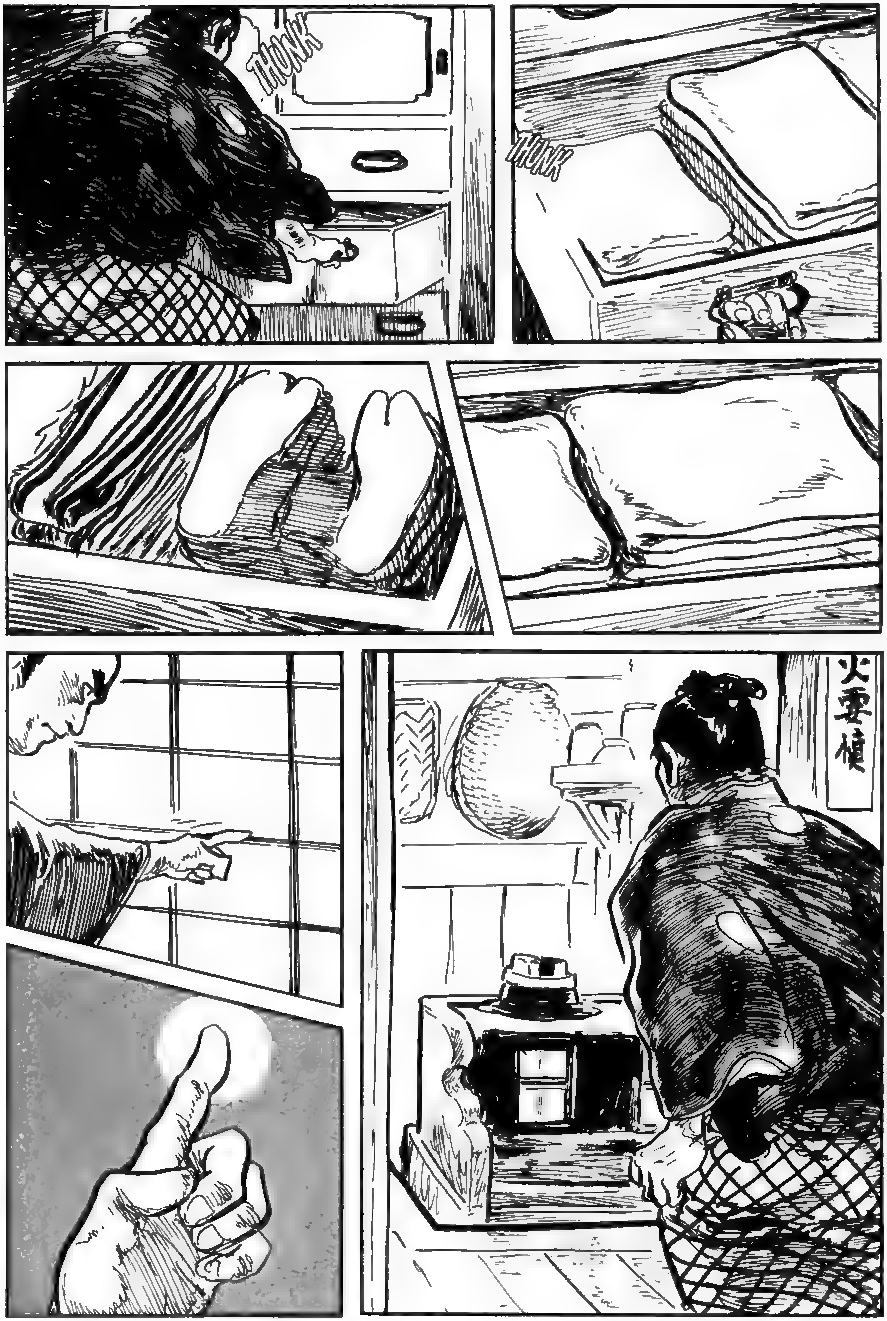
YOU KNEW ALL THAT WHEN YOU MARRIED ME! AND THAT'S WHY...
...I TRIED TO STOP YOU FROM MARRYING ME SO I WOULDN'T CAUSE YOU ANY TROUBLE!
B-BUT NOW IT'S JUST GETTING WORSE...
GET UP!
DIDN'T YOU MAKE A BIG DEAL ABOUT HOW WE WERE GOING TO BE TOGETHER TILL DEATH DO US PART?!
WAAAH!
THE ISSUE ISN'T YOUR STATUS, YOUR BIRTH, YOUR TATTOO, OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT.

IT'S ABOUT YOUR DUTIES AS A WIFE. THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKING TO YOU ABOUT.
I'M A COP. MY LEGS GET STIFF AS I WALK AROUND UNDER THE BLAZING SUN.
WHEN I COME HOME I'M DEAD TIRED. AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING? SLEEPING THE DAY AWAY NAKED!
AND YOU KEEP SHOWING YOUR TATTOO! IF YOU TURN OVER IN YOUR SLEEP, PEOPLE CAN SEE IT!
WHAT IF SOMEBODY CAME IN?! THEN WHAT?!
WHACK!

THEY'D BE LAUGHING AT ME, THAT'S WHAT!
WHACK!
WHEN I COME HOME, YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO MAKE ME FEEL WELCOME. WASH MY FEET.
WITH A COLD TOWEL.
CHANGE MY CLOTHES. FAN ME. THEN FEED ME.
I CAME HOME EARLY TODAY, SO YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO PREPARE A MEAL YET.
B-BUT I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D BE COMING HOME THIS EARLY!

FOOL!
IT DOESN'T MATTER WHEN I COME HOME! YOU SHOULD ALWAYS BE A PROPER WIFE FOR A JITTE MAN!
BUT IT WAS SO HOT!
YOU TOLD ME I COULDN'T SWIM, SO I TOOK A BATH... AND A NAP...
WHACK!

HOW MANY TIMES DO I GOTTA *REPEAT* MYSELF?!
I CAN DO ANYTHING *I* WANT! I'M *HOT* AND I'M *BORED*. YOU *CAN'T* BE NAPPING!
YOU *CAN'T*!
YOU JUST *CAN'T*!
WASHING, CLEANING, SEWING...
A WOMAN'S GOT A *LOT* TO KEEP HER *BUSY*!
I'VE *ALREADY* DONE ALL THAT!
WHAT?!


THUNK
THUNK
火要慎

I DID EVERYTHING, YOU KNOW
HMPH. WHAT'S WRONG?! IT'S NOT MANLY IF THINGS ARE IN A MESS?! WHAT'S WITH YOU ACTING SO FUSSY?! YOU'RE ACTING LIKE A WOMAN!
SHINKO!
DAMN YOU!!

DIDN'T I DO EVERYTHING I WAS SUPPOSED TO?! SO WHAT IF I WAS NAKED?!
I GET WEAK DURING THE SUMMER! I COULDN'T GO SWIMMING, SO THE KAPPA ON MY BACK WAS CRYING! BUT I PUT UP WITH IT!
YOU SLUT!
BSHH!
EEE!
SO FINALLY I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE UP TO!
ASSHOLE!
BITCH!

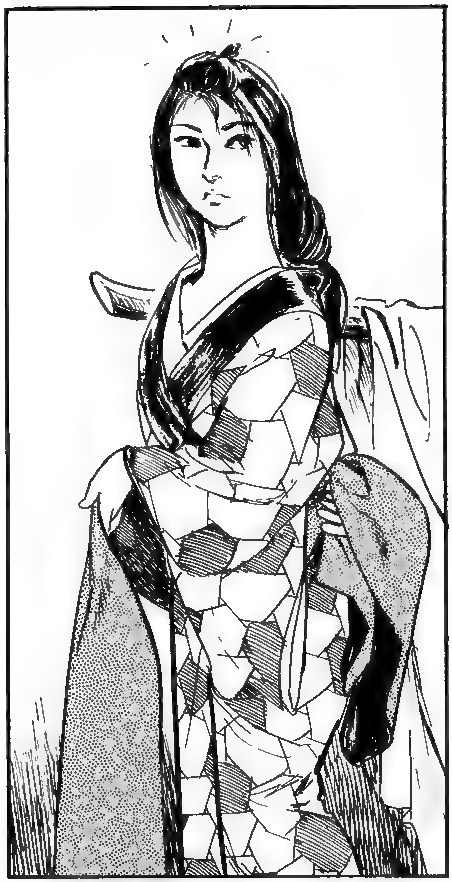
CRACK
THUD!
BAM!
KERTHUNK!
TH-THAT HURTS, YOU...!
KYAAAA
WHAM!
AAAH!
CHOMP!
OW!

GET OUT!
YOU'RE ASKING ME?!
AHHH, I CAN'T TAKE THIS ANYMORE! I CAN'T!
PANT PANT PANT

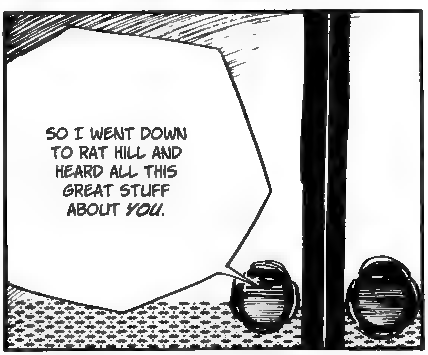
ARE YOU HERE, KASAJIRŌ?

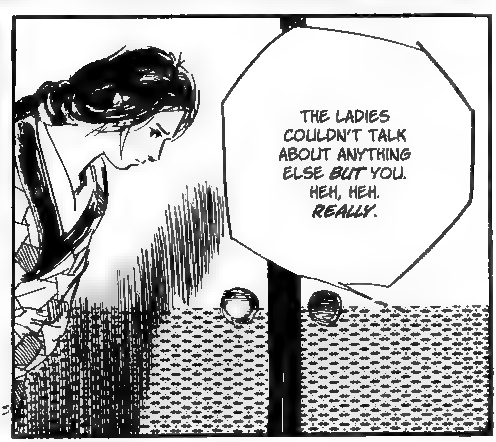
WOW, SHE'S DONE IT AGAIN.
YOU TWO REALLY MADE A MESS THIS TIME, DIDN'T YOU?

WHAT IS IT, YAKICHI?
IT'S ABOUT THE GUY WE'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR— GINJI. I GOT SOME GOOD NEWS FOR YOU.
HIS EX COMES OUT AT NIGHT AT THE SECOND RIVER BANK TO WORK HER TRADE. HER RIGHT LEG'S BAD. THEY SAY HER NAME'S O-YOSHI.
WHERE'D YOU HEAR THAT?
IT'S THANKS TO YOU.
HUH?!
YOU'VE GOT A GREAT REPUTATION.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?!
I'M TALKING ABOUT THE PROSTITUTES.



I DIDN'T KNOW YOU CONDUCTED AN INVESTIGATION EARLIER TODAY.


SO I WENT DOWN TO RAT HILL AND HEARD ALL THIS GREAT STUFF ABOUT *YOU*.


THE LADIES COULDN'T TALK ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE *BUT* YOU. HEH, HEH. *REALLY*.

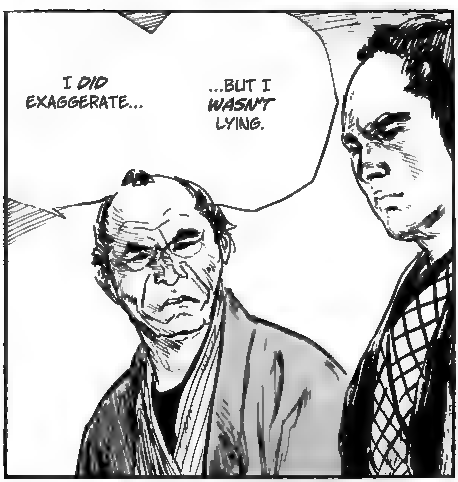
I DON'T GET IT. THAT WOULDN'T HAVE EVER OCCURRED TO ME. I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING.
WHEN YOU WENT THERE, THERE WAS A LADY WHO WAS WASHING HERSELF. SHE WAS PRAISING YOU. MAYBE SHE'D EVEN *FALLEN* FOR YOU.
ANYWAY, SHE WAS WASHING HERSELF, AND SHE HAD A REAL *LIVELY* FACE FOR A LADY DOWN THERE...
SHE WAS QUITE A LITTLE LADY. HEH, HEH.
SEEMS LIKE YOU ASKED HER TO GIVE HER YOUR TOWEL. AFTER SHE HAD HER SWEAT WIPED OFF, SHE WRUNG IT FOR YOU.

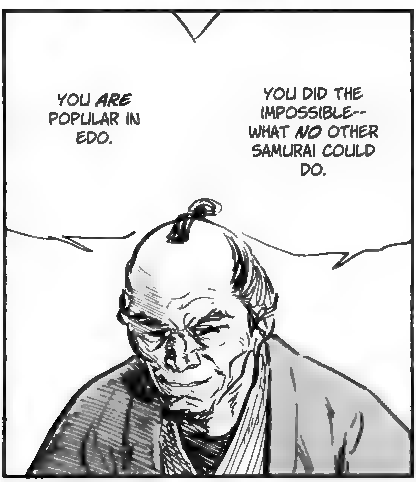
UH-HUH.
SHE TOLD ME I WAS A *CENTIPEDE*.
SHE *HATES* THE HATCHŌBORI PATROLMEN AS MUCH AS SHE HATES CENTIPEDES CRAWLING AROUND.
THAT'S WHY SHE *INTENTIONALLY* WRUNG THE TOWEL IN THE *DIRTIEST* WATER THAT WAS CLOSEST TO YOU.
BUT YOU DIDN'T GET MAD *AT ALL*. YOUR FACE DIDN'T SHOW A *THING*. YOU TOOK THAT TOWEL ANYWAY AND WIPED OFF YOUR SWEAT.
I HEARD THAT SHOOK HER UP FROM *HEAD* TO *TOE*.
YOU'RE A *JIKISAN*. YOU'RE ON A TOTALLY DIFFERENT LEVEL THAN A DOWNHILL WHORE LIKE *HER*. YOU AND SHE ARE AS FAR APART AS *HEAVEN* AND *EARTH*. EVEN *I* WOULDN'T HAVE WIPED THE SOLES OF MY FEET WITH *THAT* TOWEL!

THE RUMORS WERE RIGHT. CATCHER KASAJIRŌ TREATED THAT LOWLY WOMAN *DECENTLY*. HE REALLY *WAS* THE HUSBAND OF SHINKO THE *KAPPA*.
STOP FLATTERING ME.
I'M NOT JUST MAKING THIS UP. I *COULDN'T*.
THIS IS WHAT THOSE WOMEN WERE REALLY SAYING. THEY WERE *JEALOUS* OF SHINKO. SHE MEANS SO MUCH TO YOU, AND YOU TAKE SUCH GREAT CARE OF HER.
THEY WERE SAYING THAT SHINKO MUST'VE BEEN A *REAL* WOMAN'S WOMAN IF YOU'D *RISK YOUR LIFE* TO *MARRY* HER.
BOTH OF YOU HAVE A GOOD REPUTATION, NOT JUST DOWN THERE, BUT *ANYWHERE* YOU GO.

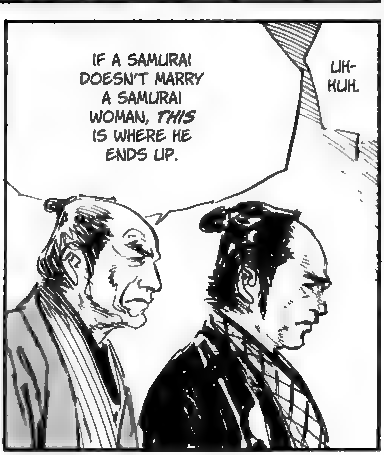
AND THAT'S HOW I GOT THE SCOOP ON GINJI.
ALL THANKS TO *YOU*. HEH HEH.
WHEN YOU GET *THIS* CLOSE TO SOMEBODY...
...YOU GET *ENVIOUS* AT TIMES LIKE THESE.
I NEVER KNOW WHEN *MY* WIFE'S HOME OR NOT.
THIS IS SUCH DEPRESSING STUFF TO TALK ABOUT...
YAKICHI, LET'S STAKE OUT THE SECOND RIVER BANK!
OKAY!

A MEDIATOR'S *ALWAYS* RIGHT.
YOU WERE TALKING LIKE THAT BECAUSE YOU *KNEW* SHINKO WAS EAVESDROPPING.


I *DID* EXAGGERATE...
...BUT I *WASN'T* LYING.


YOU *ARE* POPULAR IN EDO.
YOU DID THE IMPOSSIBLE-- WHAT *NO* OTHER SAMURAI COULD DO.

DON'T FORGET THAT.


IF A SAMURAI DOESN'T MARRY A SAMURAI WOMAN, *THIS* IS WHERE HE ENDS UP.
UH-HUH.

I THINK THAT IF YOU HAD TOLD YOUR WIFE, "DIE!" SHE'D HAVE DIED ON THE SPOT. NO QUESTIONS ASKED.
SHE CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT HER HUSBAND.
SHE'S MORE THAN ANY SAMURAI WOMAN.
THAT'S ENOUGH. I GET YOUR POINT.

"GET OUT!"
YOU DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING LIKE *THAT* TO HER, DID YOU?
...
...?!
I'LL BE GOING AHEAD.
S-SORRY. I'LL BE R-RIGHT BACK.
LOOKS LIKE I DID HIM *TOO MUCH* GOOD.

SHINKO!

SHINKO!

YOU OKAY, KASAJIRO?
IT'S 'CAUSE... I TOLD HER TO GET OUT.
AH, JUST AS I HAD THOUGHT.
IF SHE LEFT, THERE ARE TWO POSSIBILITIES.
W-WHAT ARE THEY?
SHHH. KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN.
SURELY YOU'D KNOW.
TELL ME, WHAT ARE THEY...
FIRST, YOU COULD INVENT AN AFFAIR WHILE YOU TWO TRY TO HAVE A CHILD.

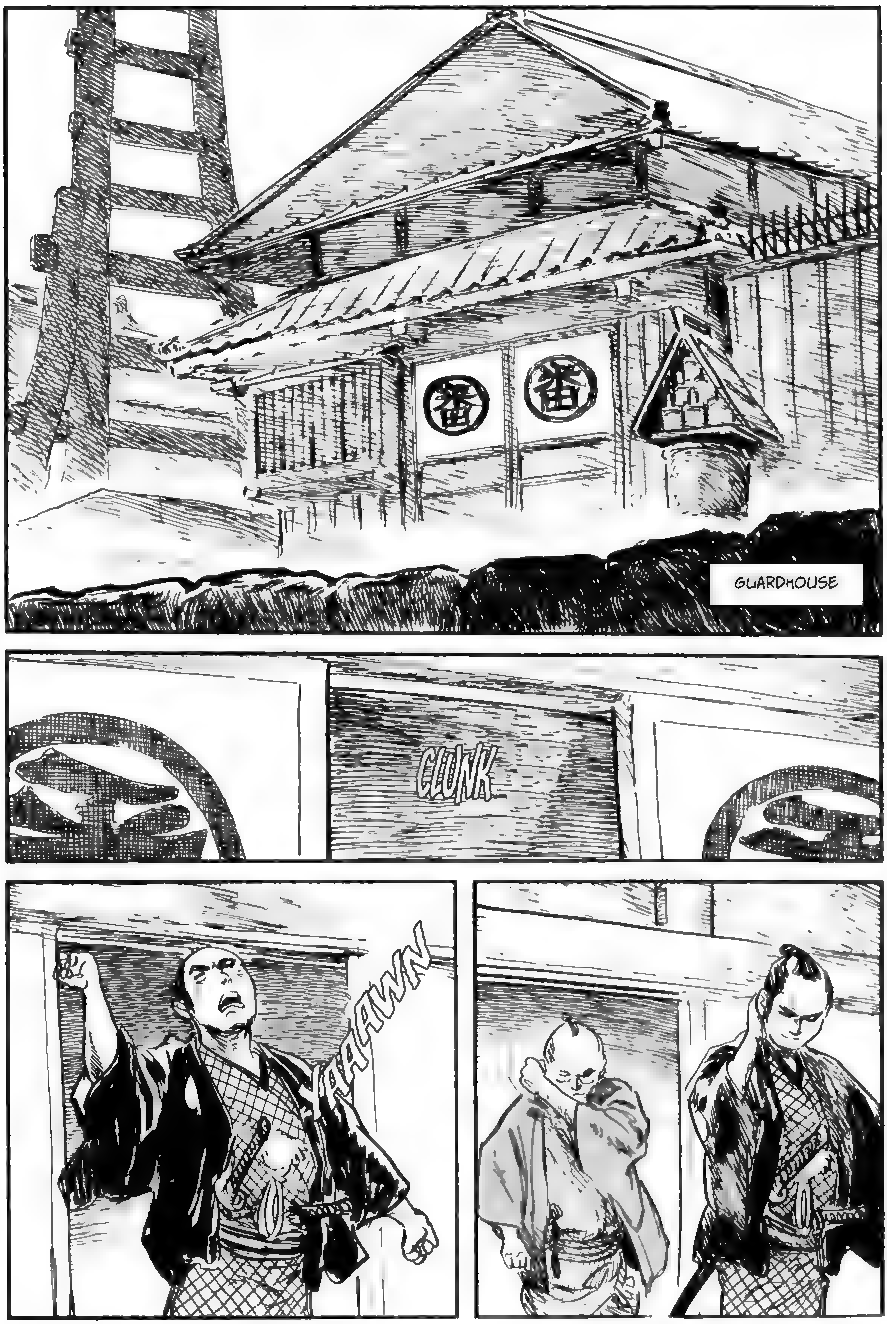
EVEN THOUGH YOUR MISTRESS WILL BE MADE UP, YOUR WIFE WILL FEAR THAT "SHE" WILL COME BACK SOMEDAY, SO SHE *WON'T* RUN AWAY. AND THAT'S WHY THE CHILD...
I WOULD *NEVER* DO SUCH A THING!
WHAT'S THE *ALTERNATIVE*?!
IT'S WHEN *YOU YOURSELF* STAND IN THE WAY OF YOUR BIRTH AND STATUS.
UH-HUH.
I CAN'T TELL YOU ANYTHING MORE...
BUT DIDN'T YOU SAY SAID I *COULDN'T* HAVE TOLD HER TO GET OUT?
I HAD HOPED TO PATCH THINGS UP BETWEEN YOU *BEFORE* SHE HAD LEFT.
B-BUT YOU...
NOTHING CAN KEEP AN OLD MAN DOWN.

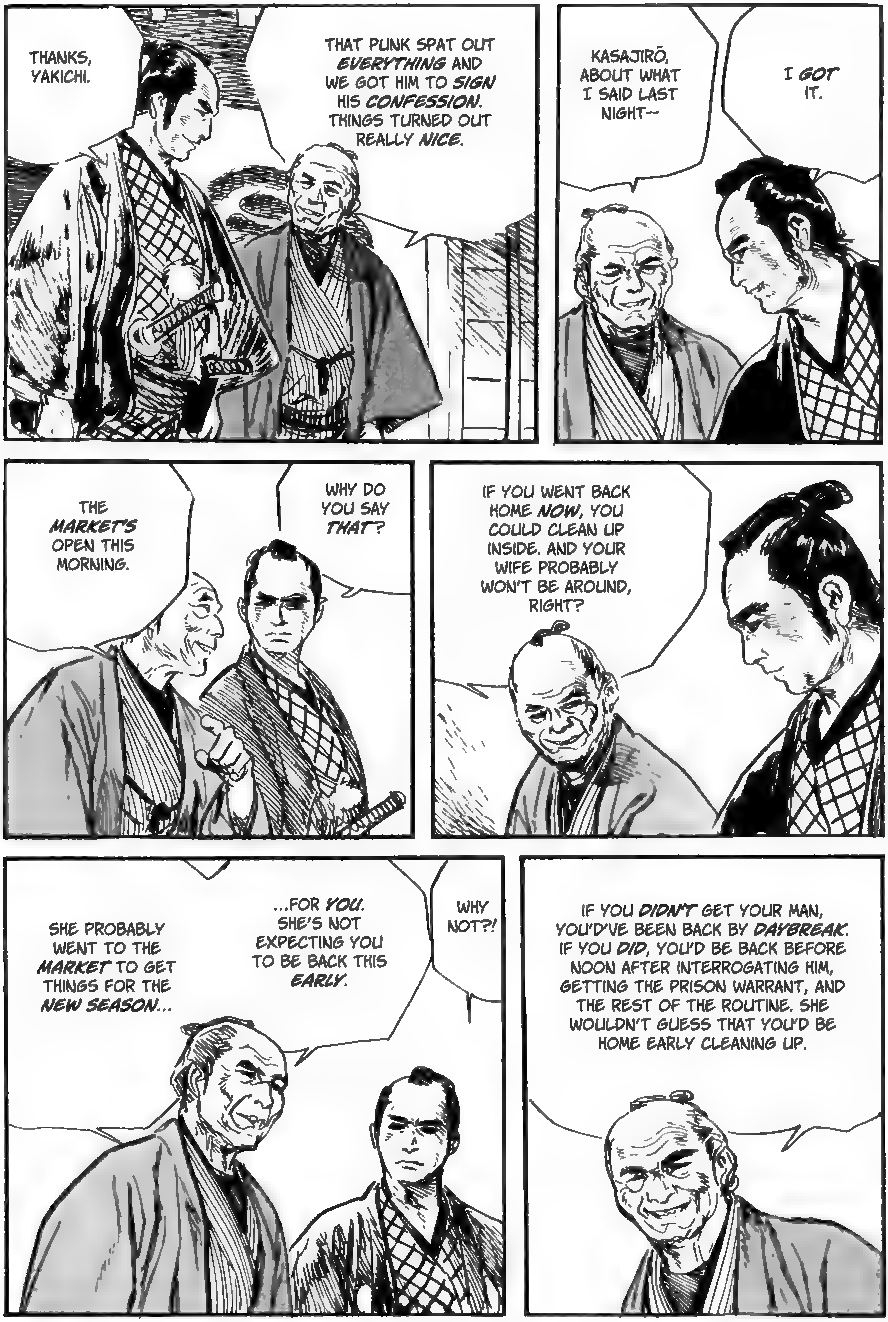
IT'S THE WISDOM OF AGE. I'VE GOT MORE EXPERIENCE THAN YOU IN THIS FIELD.
BUT WHERE'D SHE GO?!
TO HAVE HER HAIR TIED.
HUH?
SHE'LL HAVE A BUN. I CAN SENSE IT!
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, SHE DID WEAR ONE ONCE...
AND YOU DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING TO HER, DID YOU?
YOU SHOULD'VE COMPLEMENTED HER.
THAT'S WHAT A MAN'S GOTTA DO EVERY TIME A WOMAN CHANGES.
THEY DO THAT BECAUSE THEY'LL DO ANYTHING TO PLEASE THE MAN THEY LOVE.
AND IF YOU PUSH THEM IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION, THEY MAY GET DESPERATE.
HMMM...
TOO BAD. SHE'S NOT USED TO WEARING A BUN, AND ON TOP OF THAT, SHE MUST'VE BEEN EMBARRASSED.

NO MATTER WHAT, YOU'VE GOT TO BE *NICE* TO HER.
BUT IT'S BECAUSE SHE *WHINES* ABOUT WANTING TO SWIM...
YOU'LL HAVE A *CHILD* SOON.
THAT'S TOTALLY *IMPOSSIBLE*.
IT ISN'T.
PUT YOUR EAR AGAINST YOUR WIFE'S BELLY.
ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS ASK HER, "IS IT THERE YET?"
UH-HUH.
DO *THAT*, AND SHE'LL NEVER SAY SHE WANTS TO GO SWIMMING AGAIN.
SO *THAT'S* HOW IT'S DONE.
YES, THAT *IS*...
GASP!

THE WAY SHE'S WALKING... THAT'S GOTTA BE O-YOSHI.
THAT'S GINJI!

GINJI, YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!


GUARDHOUSE
CLUNK
YAAWN


THANKS, YAKICHI.
THAT PUNK SPAT OUT *EVERYTHING* AND WE GOT HIM TO *SIGN* HIS *CONFESSION*. THINGS TURNED OUT REALLY *NICE*.
KASAJIRŌ, ABOUT WHAT I SAID LAST NIGHT--
I *GOT* IT.
THE *MARKET'S* OPEN THIS MORNING.
WHY DO YOU SAY *THAT*?
IF YOU WENT BACK HOME *NOW*, YOU COULD CLEAN UP INSIDE. AND YOUR WIFE PROBABLY WON'T BE AROUND, RIGHT?
SHE PROBABLY WENT TO THE *MARKET* TO GET THINGS FOR THE *NEW SEASON*...
...FOR *YOU*. SHE'S NOT EXPECTING YOU TO BE BACK THIS *EARLY*.
WHY NOT?!
IF YOU *DIDN'T* GET YOUR MAN, YOU'D'VE BEEN BACK BY *DAYBREAK*. IF YOU *DID*, YOU'D BE BACK BEFORE NOON AFTER INTERROGATING HIM, GETTING THE PRISON WARRANT, AND THE REST OF THE ROUTINE. SHE WOULDN'T GUESS THAT YOU'D BE HOME EARLY CLEANING UP.

WOULD SHE HAVE THOUGHT THINGS OUT *THAT* MUCH?
OH YES, SHE *WOULD*. THAT'S WHAT A WIFE IS *REALLY* LIKE.
HER *WHOLE* LIFE REVOLVES AROUND HER *HUSBAND*.
NOW I'M KIND OF *EMBARRASSED*.
WHAT SHOULD I *SAY*?
YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY *ANYTHING*. A MAN DOESN'T *NEED* WORDS TO MOVE A WOMAN'S HEART. CAN I TELL YOU A SECRET?
SURE, GO AHEAD.
WHEN YOU GO HOME, GO TO *SLEEP*-- WITH YOUR CLOTHES STILL ON.
EVEN THOUGH SHE GOT MAD AND FOUGHT YOU WHEN YOU TOSSED HER CLOTHES OUT OF THE DRAWERS...
...SHE *REGRETS* THAT NOW. A NEW DAY'S BROKEN. YOU LONG FOR HER *SMELL*, AND SHE LONGS FOR YOUR *HEART*...HEH HEH. SHE'LL COME *RIGHT BACK* TO YOU!

IF SHINKO COMES HOME NOW, EVERYTHING'S GONNA...
GASP!

HE WAS *RIGHT*.
IT'S *JUST* LIKE
HE SAID.

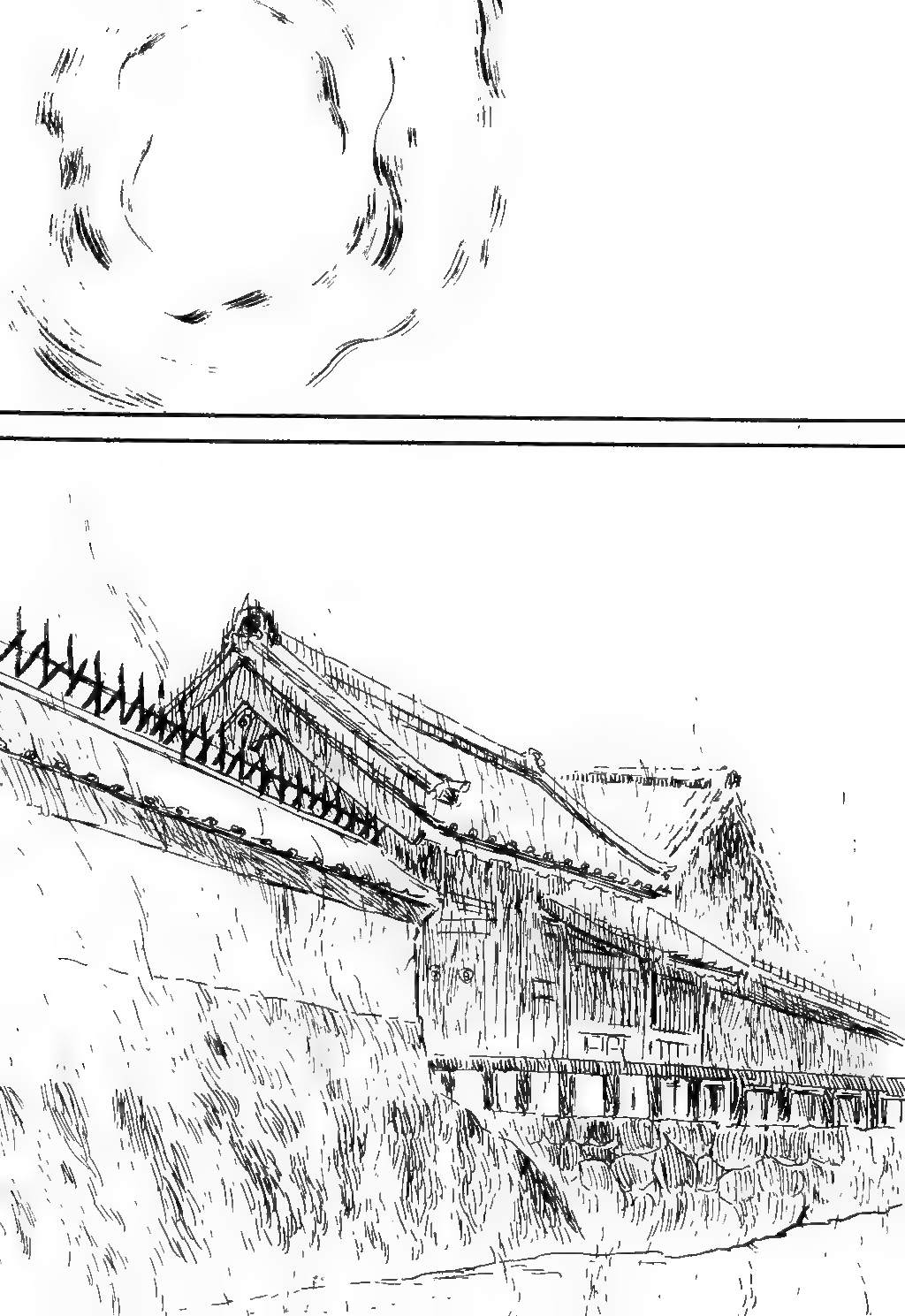
WISDOM REALLY DOES COME WITH AGE...
I'VE GOT TO LISTEN FOR HER. EVEN I'M STARTING TO LOSE IT.
HEH, HEH.
HERE SHE COMES...
IN A KIMONO?
OH!

WELL...

YOU WERE RIGHT, DOWN TO THE *LAST DETAIL*, YAKICHI.
OLD PEOPLE ARE... *SCARY*. I'VE GOTTA BECOME A GUY LIKE *HIM*. SOMEBODY WHO UNDERSTANDS A *WOMAN'S THIRST*.
BUT I'VE GOT A *LONG* WAY TO GO.

the forty-sixth

Farewell Drums



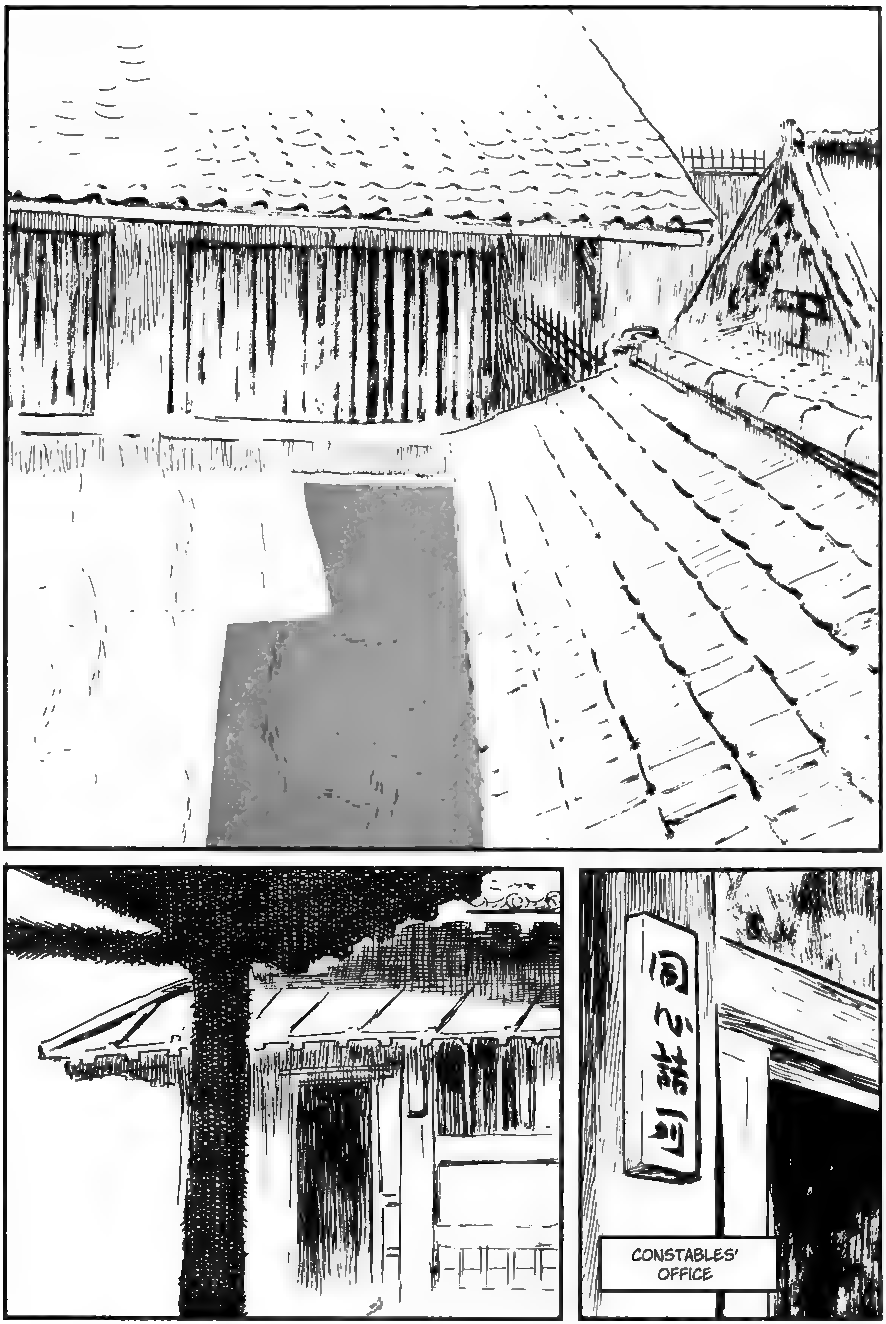
TENMA PRISON
CAN'T STAND THIS HEAT. IT'S LIKE THE GATES OF HELL JUST OPENED UP!
NOT EVEN THE SLIGHTEST BREEZE.
SPLASH
WARSH!

THE DUTCH STUDIES SCHOLAR TAKANO CHOEI DESCRIBED HOW HOT IT WAS INSIDE TENMA IN HIS *RECORD INSIDE PRISON*.
"THE MIDDLE OF MAY IS EXTREMELY HOT, BUT THIS YEAR IT WAS EVEN HOTTER--*SO* HOT THAT EVEN THE RELATIVELY 'COOL' EVENINGS BECAME *UNBEARABLE*.

"DUTCH STUDIES--THE JAPANESE STUDY OF WESTERN SCIENCE BROUGHT TO JAPAN BY THE DUTCH.

"MOREOVER, SUNLIGHT DOES NOT PENETRATE THE PRISON WALLS, AND *DOZENS* OF MEN WERE TIGHTLY PACKED IN *DARKNESS*.
"AMIDST THE INTOLERABLE HEAT, THE ODOR OF THE *SICK* COMBINED WITH VARIOUS *EXCRETA* FORMED A STRANGE *STENCH*.

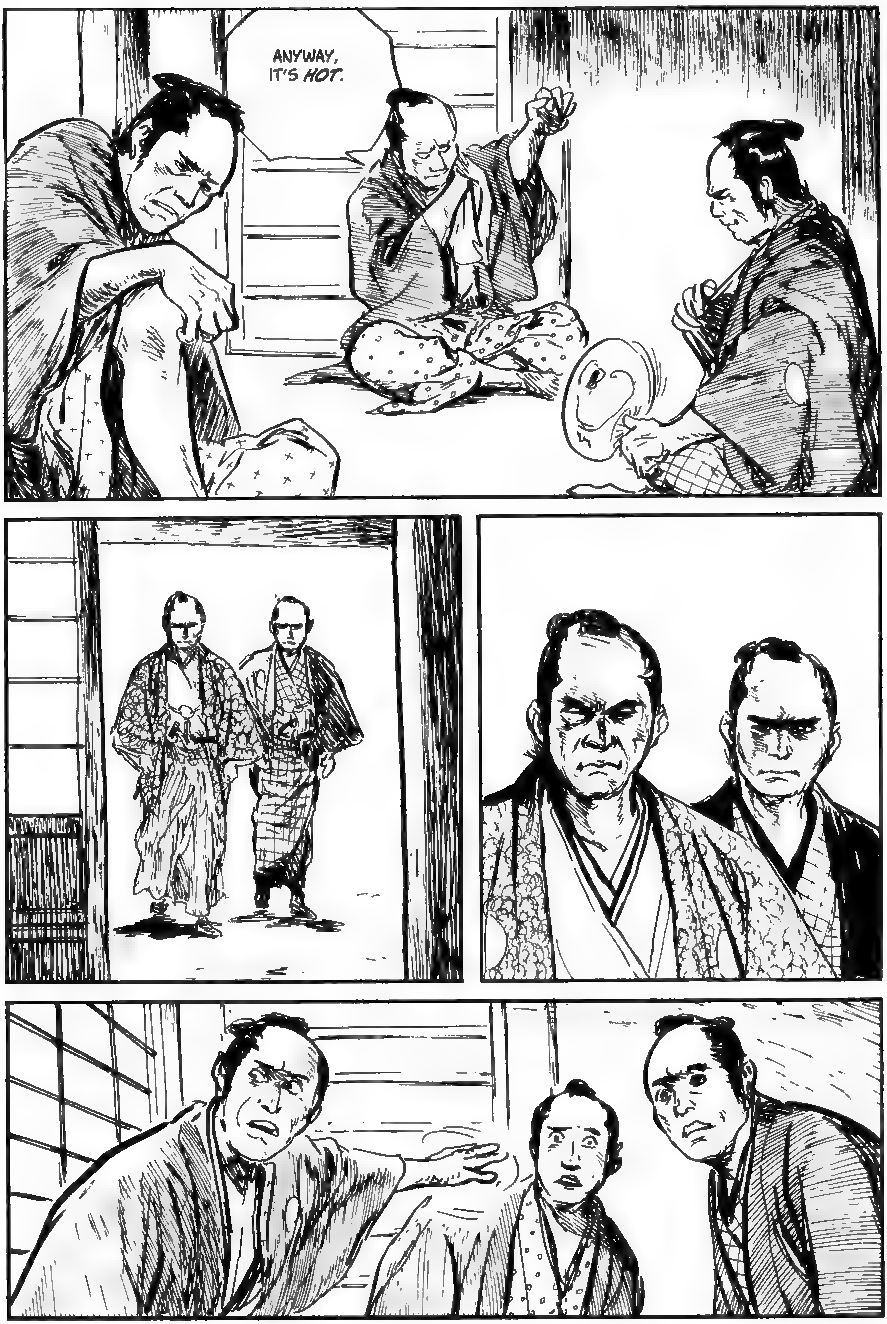
"THE SMELL DIFFUSED THROUGHOUT THE PRISON. IT WAS BEYOND COMPARISON.
"IT WAS UNTHINKABLE THAT ANYONE COULD SURVIVE IN HERE FOR LONG.
"THE HEAT PAST THE MIDDLE OF MAY WAS NOTHING COMPARED TO THE START OF AUGUST."


CONSTABLES' OFFICE

WHAT IS IT, SIR?
ARE THERE A LOTTA GUYS NOT EATING EVEN AT NIGHT?
YEAH, ONLY THE WARDEN AND THE PRISONERS IN CHARGE ARE EATING.
IT'S BEEN SIX NON-STOP DAYS WITHOUT WIND BY OIL-LIGHT.
MOST OF THOSE GUYS ARE "CELL-SICK."
IT'S LIKE A STEAM BATH IN THERE!
AND SINCE MOST OF THEM AREN'T EATING, THEY'RE GETTING WEAK.
IT'S 'CAUSE IT'S SO HOT EVEN AT NIGHT.
MAYBE IT'S NOT THAT THEY WON'T EAT. THEY CAN'T EAT.

AT THIS RATE, I'M WORRIED THAT SOMEBODY'S GONNA GO CRAZY.
AND IF ONE GUY ACTS UP, THE REST ARE SURE TO FOLLOW.
HAVE 'EM TAKE TURNS BETWEEN THE OUTER AND INNER CHAMBERS. IT'S GOTTA BE BETTER IN THE MIDDLE.
THEN GIVE 'EM DRIED LEAF TEA THREE TIMES A DAY.
YOU THINK THAT'LL BE ENOUGH TO KEEP 'EM UNDER CONTROL?
THERE AIN'T NOTHIN' ELSE YOU CAN DO. IT AIN'T ANYBODY'S FAULT THAT IT'S THIS HOT!
YEAH.
IT'S THE SAME WITH US.
TELL THE GUYS IN CHARGE...
...NOT TO LET THEIR GUARD DOWN...AND NOT TO LET THE PRISONERS GET OUT OF HAND.

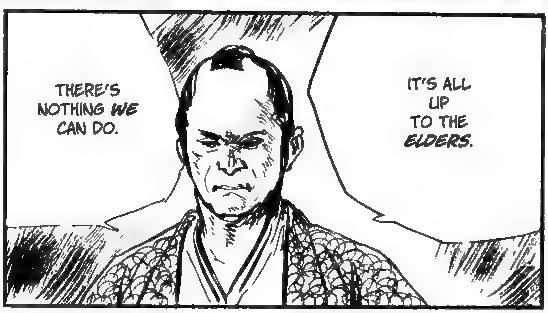
YEAH, OKAY, BUT THE GUARDS ARE *DEAD TIRED.*
WHAT IF SOMETHING SET OFF THE PRISONERS AND THEY ALL REVOLTED *TOGETHER?*
WHAT IF AN EXECUTION WARRANT GOT ISSUED *NOW?* IT'D BE *HORRIBLE.*
THAT COULD SET 'EM OFF.
EACH OF THOSE GUYS WOULD FEAR THAT *HE* WOULD BE NEXT, AND BY THEN WE'D *NEVER* BE ABLE TO REIN 'EM IN.
JUST *THINKING* OF THE PRISON REVOLT TWO YEARS AGO MAKES ME *SHUDDER.*
THAT'S *NOT* GONNA HAPPEN.
DON'T YOU GUYS *KNOW?*
NOBODY'S GONNA GET EXECUTED UNTIL IT GETS *COOL* AGAIN.
HUH. GUESSED THEY LEARNED A LESSON FROM TWO YEARS AGO.

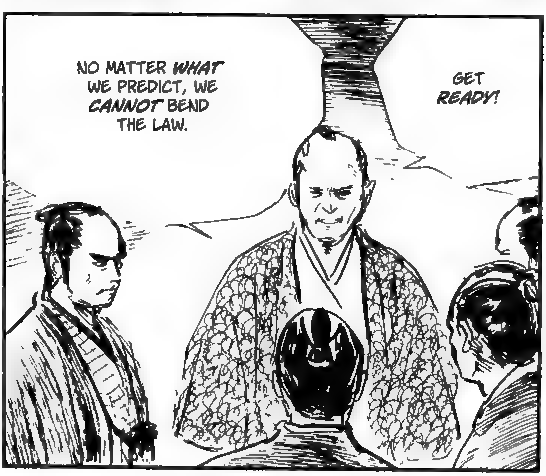

ANYWAY, IT'S HOT.

IT'S THE COMMISSIONER.
SANUKI-SAMA TOO.
I-IT CAN'T BE...
THIS IS AN EXECUTION WARRANT. YATA THE FLYING DRAGON DIES TOMORROW AT NOON.
H-HOW COULD YOU...?

IF YOU ISSUE A WARRANT NOW, THE PRISON'LL GO WILD.
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WHAT HAPPENED TWO YEARS AGO?
NO, WE HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN.

BUT IF WE STOP EXECUTING PEOPLE BECAUSE WE FEAR THAT THE PRISONERS WILL REVOLT, THAT WOULD UNDERMINE THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE.


THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO.
IT'S ALL UP TO THE ELDERS.


NO MATTER WHAT WE PREDICT, WE CANNOT BEND THE LAW.
GET READY!

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PANT
OOH

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PANT
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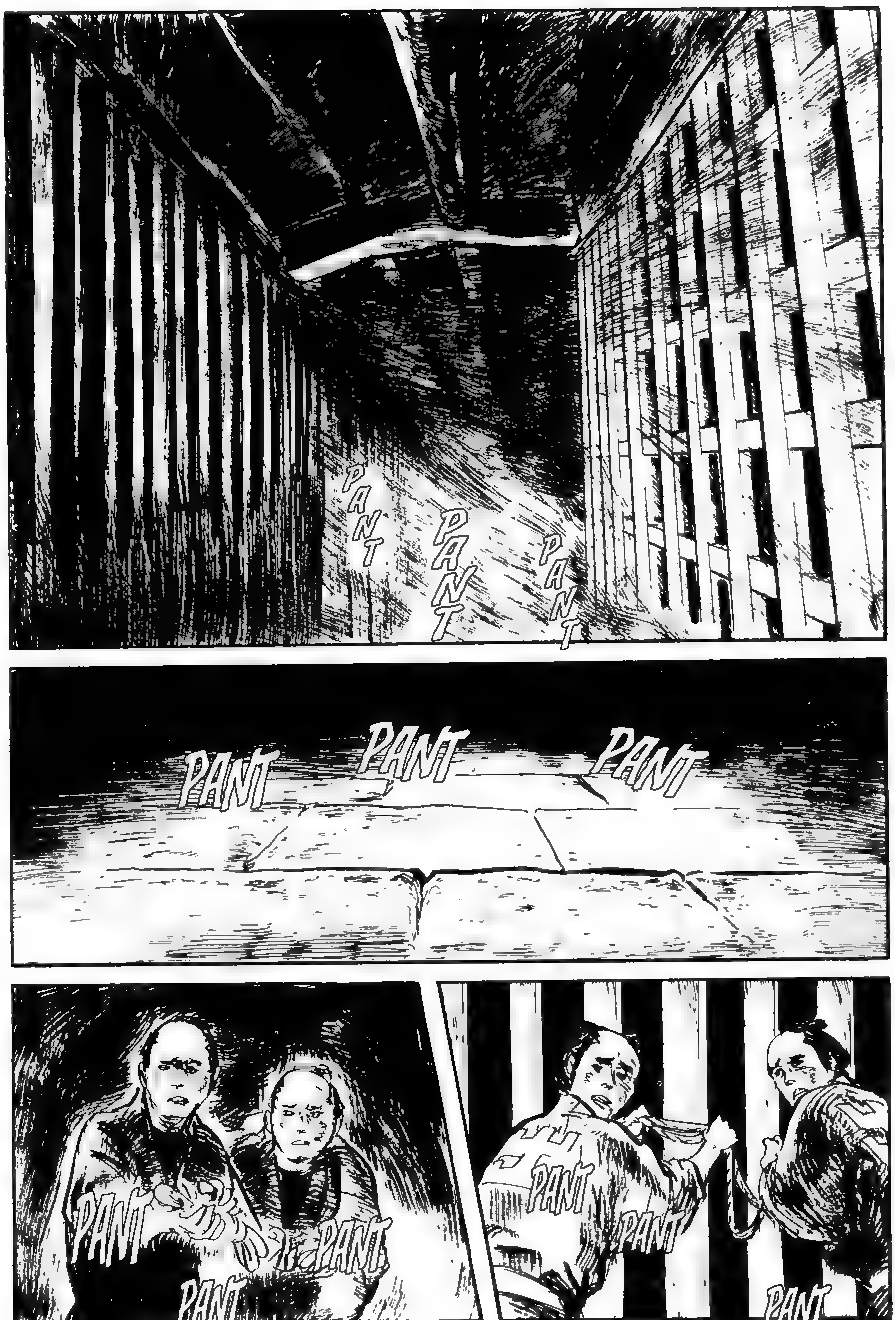
PANT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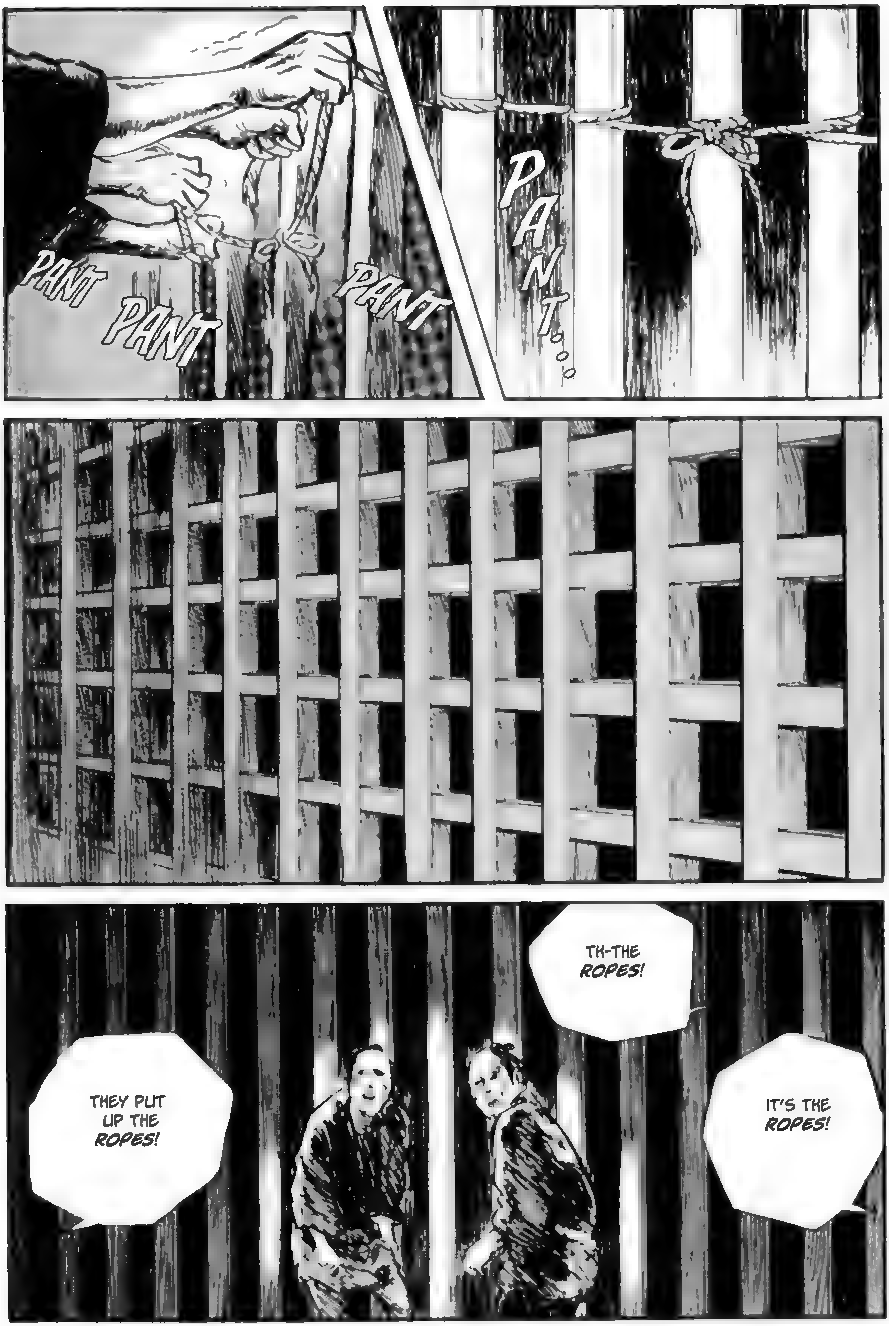
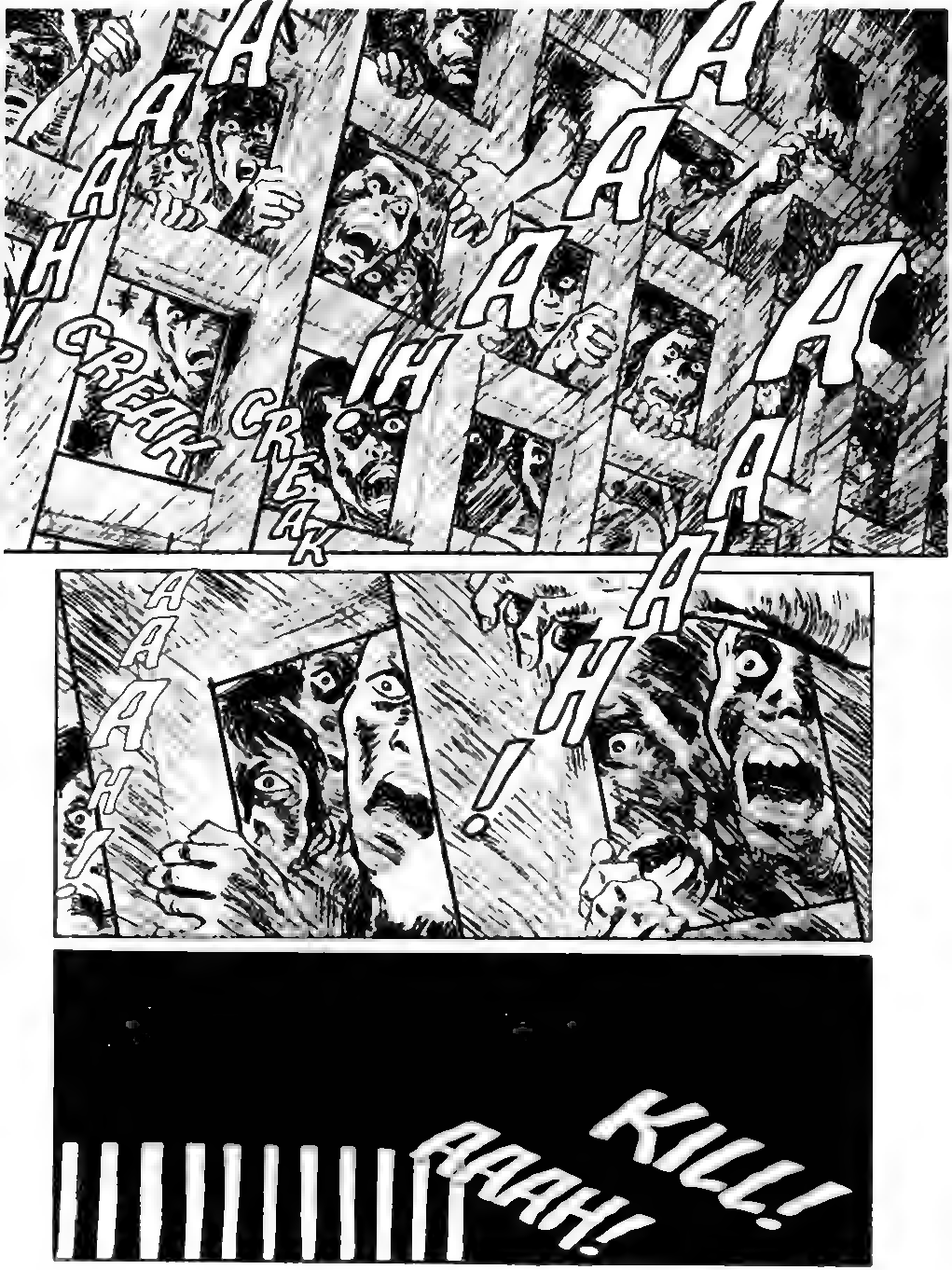
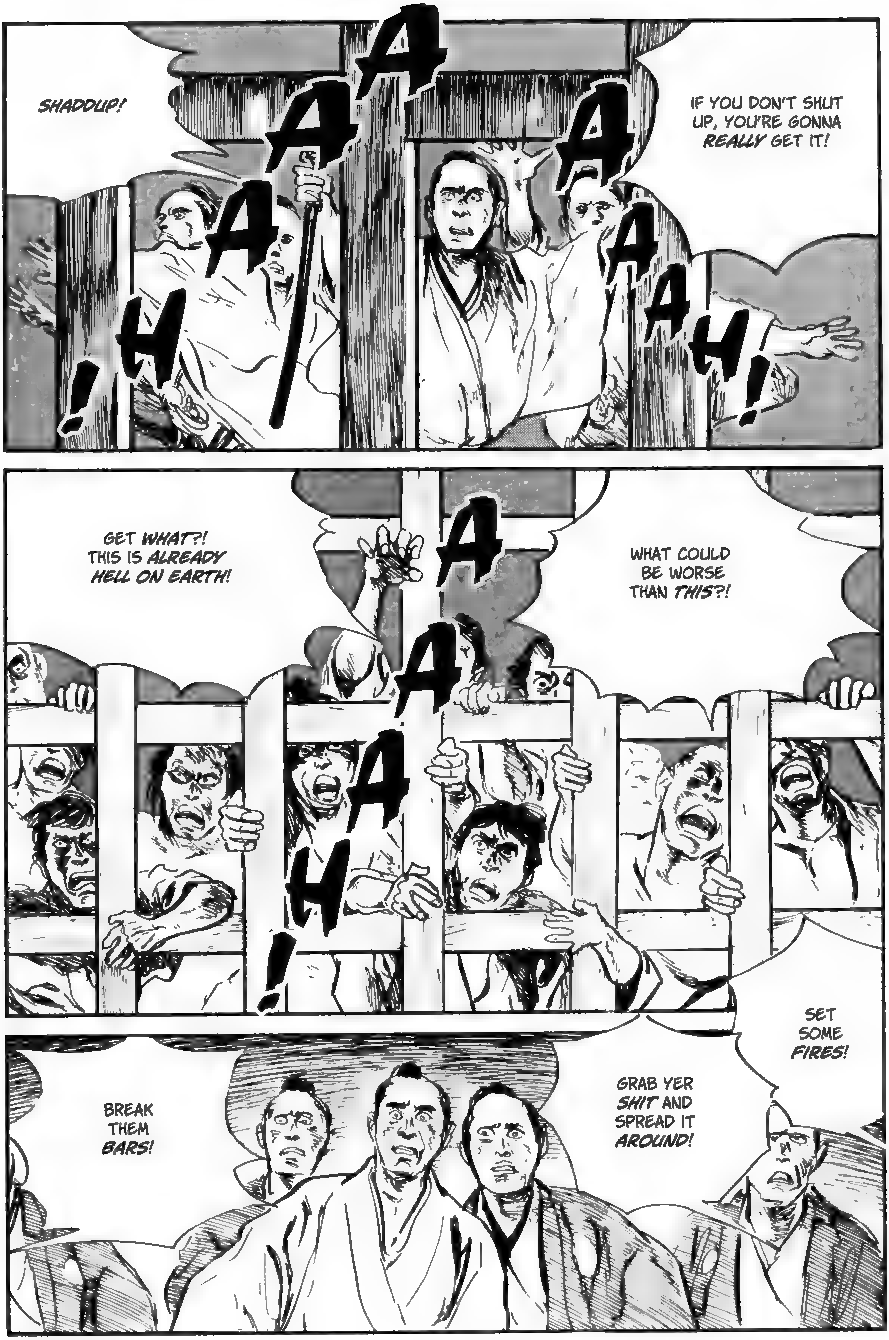
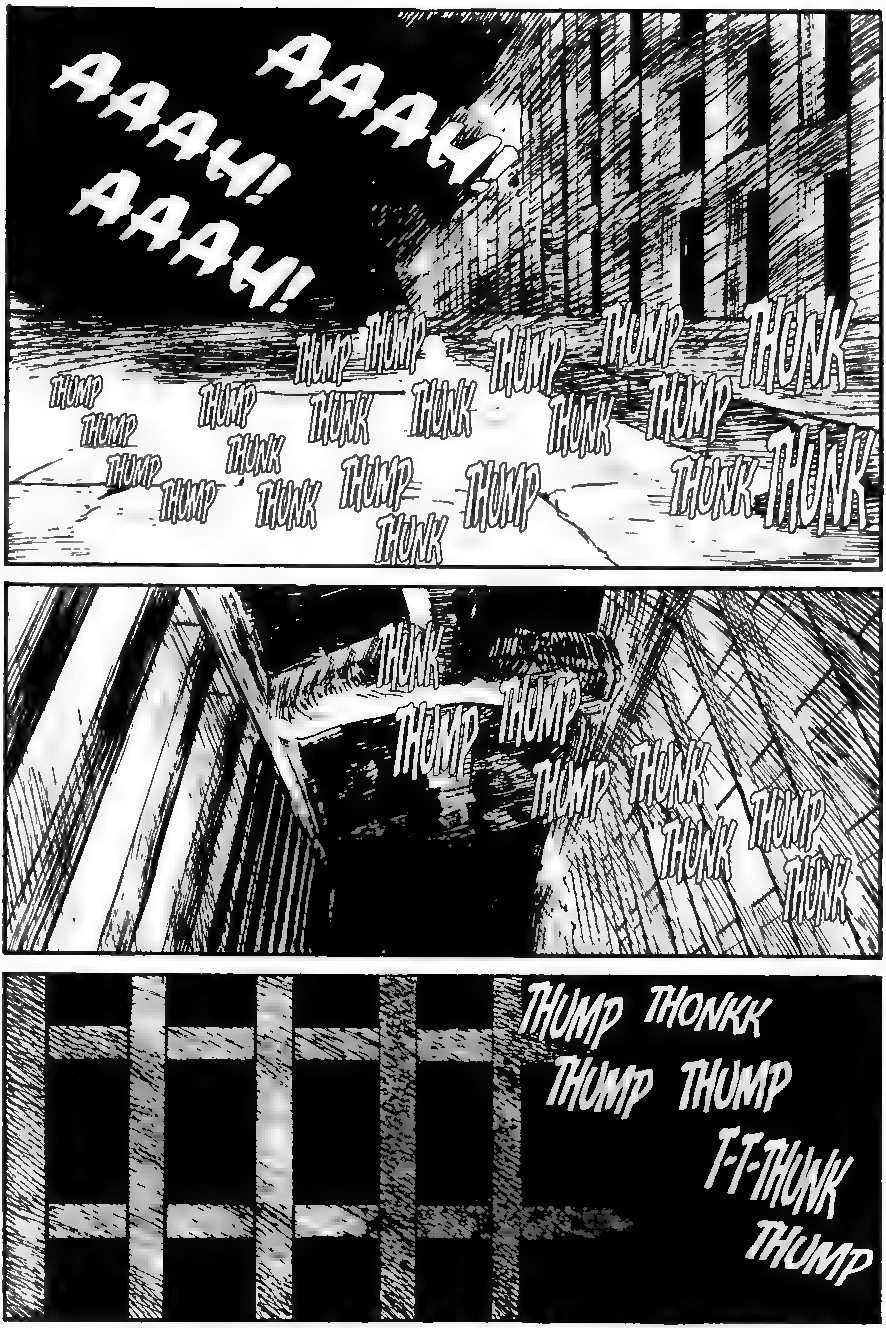

PANT
PANT
PANT
PANT...
TH-THE ROPES!
THEY PUT UP THE ROPES!
IT'S THE ROPES!

TH-THERE'S A WARRANT!
SOMEBODY'S GONNA DIE!
WH-WHO'S IT GONNA BE?
AAAH!


AAAAH!
CREAK
IH
CREAK
AAAAAAH!
AAAHH!
KILL!
AAAH!

AAARGHH!!
B-BE QUIET!
BE QUIET!
LET'S BREAK OUT!
AAAAA!
KILL 'EM ALL!
AAAAA
SHADDUP!


SHADDUP!
AAAAAH!
IF YOU DON'T SHUT UP, YOU'RE GONNA *REALLY* GET IT!
GET *WHAT*?! THIS IS *ALREADY HELL ON EARTH!*
AAAAH!
WHAT COULD BE WORSE THAN *THIS*?!
BREAK THEM *BARS!*
GRAB YER *SHIT* AND SPREAD IT *AROUND!*
SET SOME *FIRES!*


AAAH!
AAAH!
AAAH!
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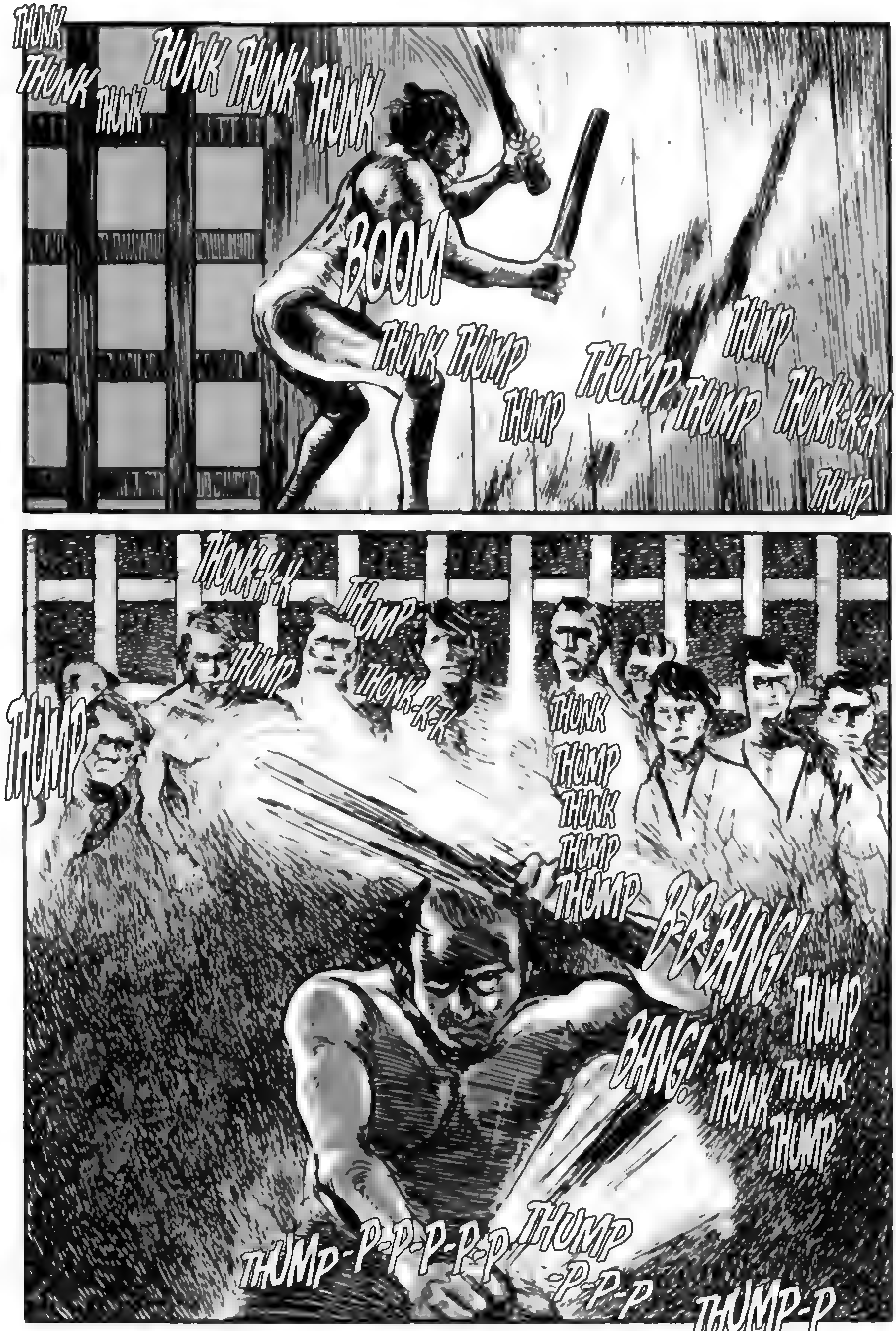
THUNK
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THUMP
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B-B-BANG!
BANG!
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THONK-K-K

THUMP
THONK-K-K
T-THONK-K-K
T-THONK-K-K
IT MAKES ME REMEMBER
YEAH.
OUR VILLAGE... AT THIS TIME OF YEAR...
THONK-K-K
THONK-K-K
THONK-K-K
T-THONK
THUMP
THUMP
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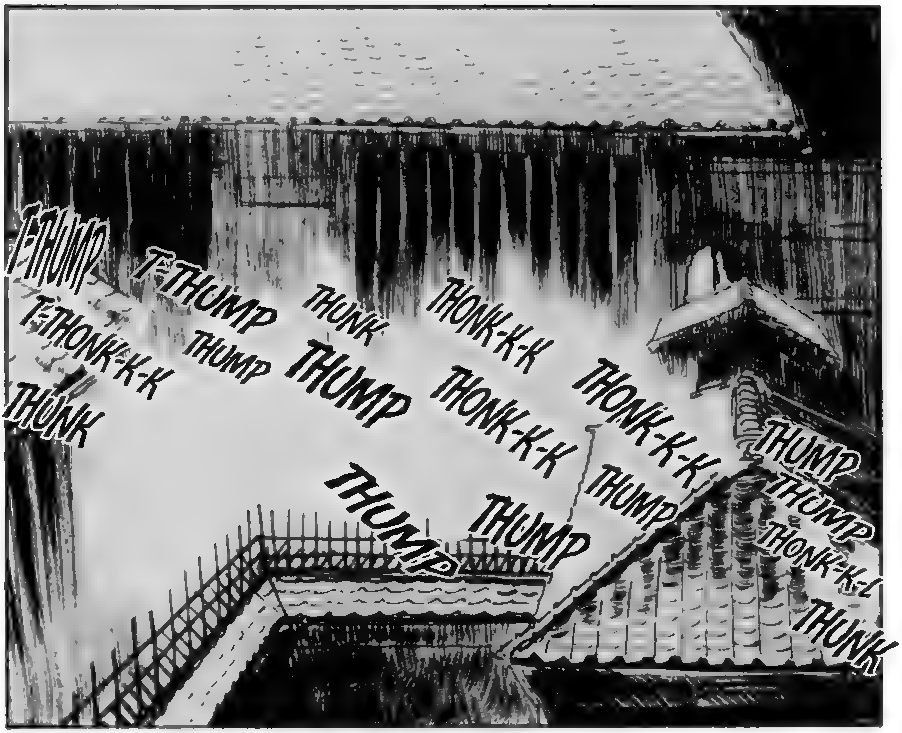
THUMP
THUMP


T-THUMP
T-THUMP
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T-THONK-K-K
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THUMP
THUMP
THONK-K-K
THUNK

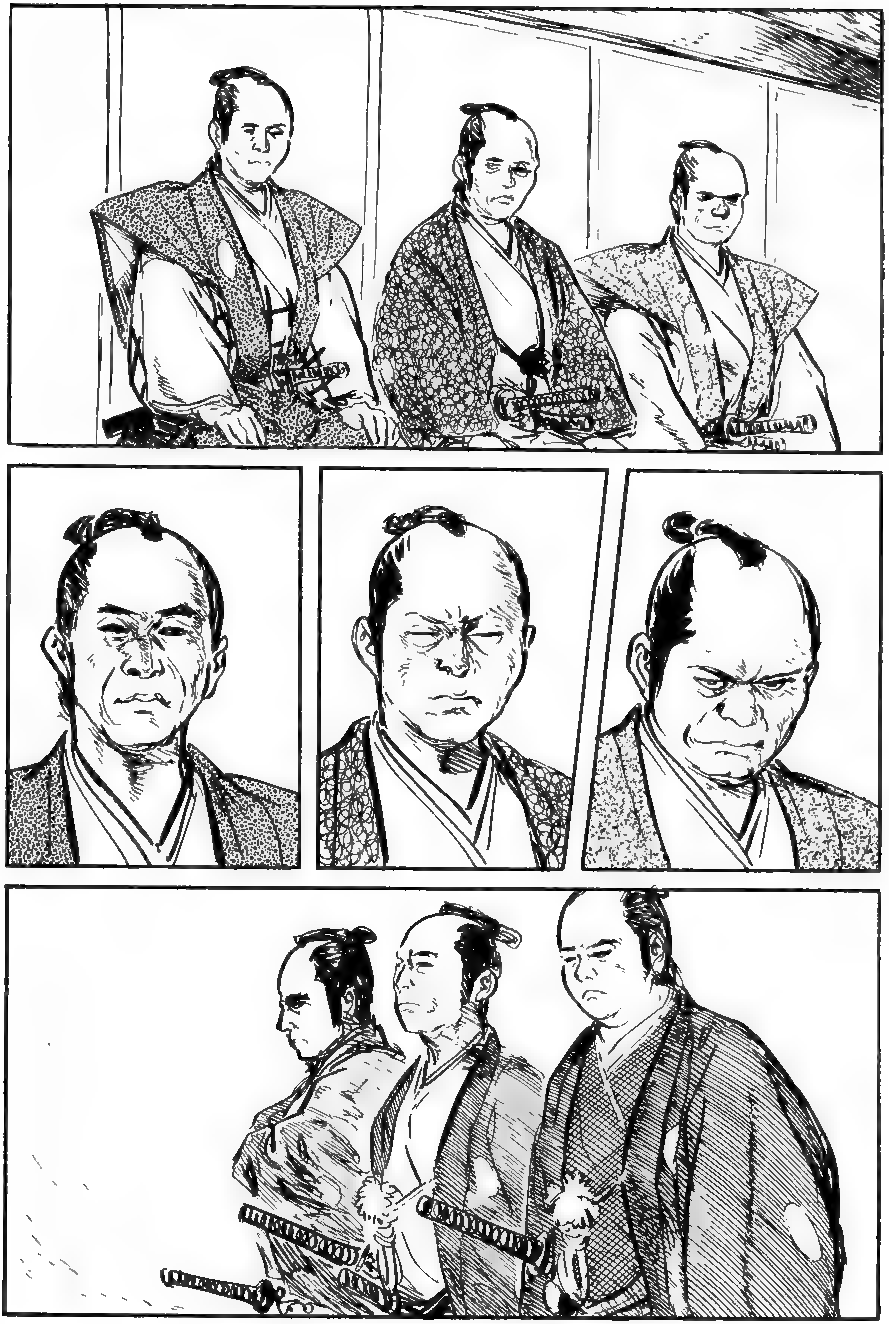
YOU CALLED YOURSELF *YATA THE FLYING DRAGON*, RIGHT?
YOU *KNEW* THAT *YOU* WOULD BE EXECUTED. SO *YOU* QUELLED LAST NIGHT'S RIOT. YOU WERE TRULY *READY* TO DIE.

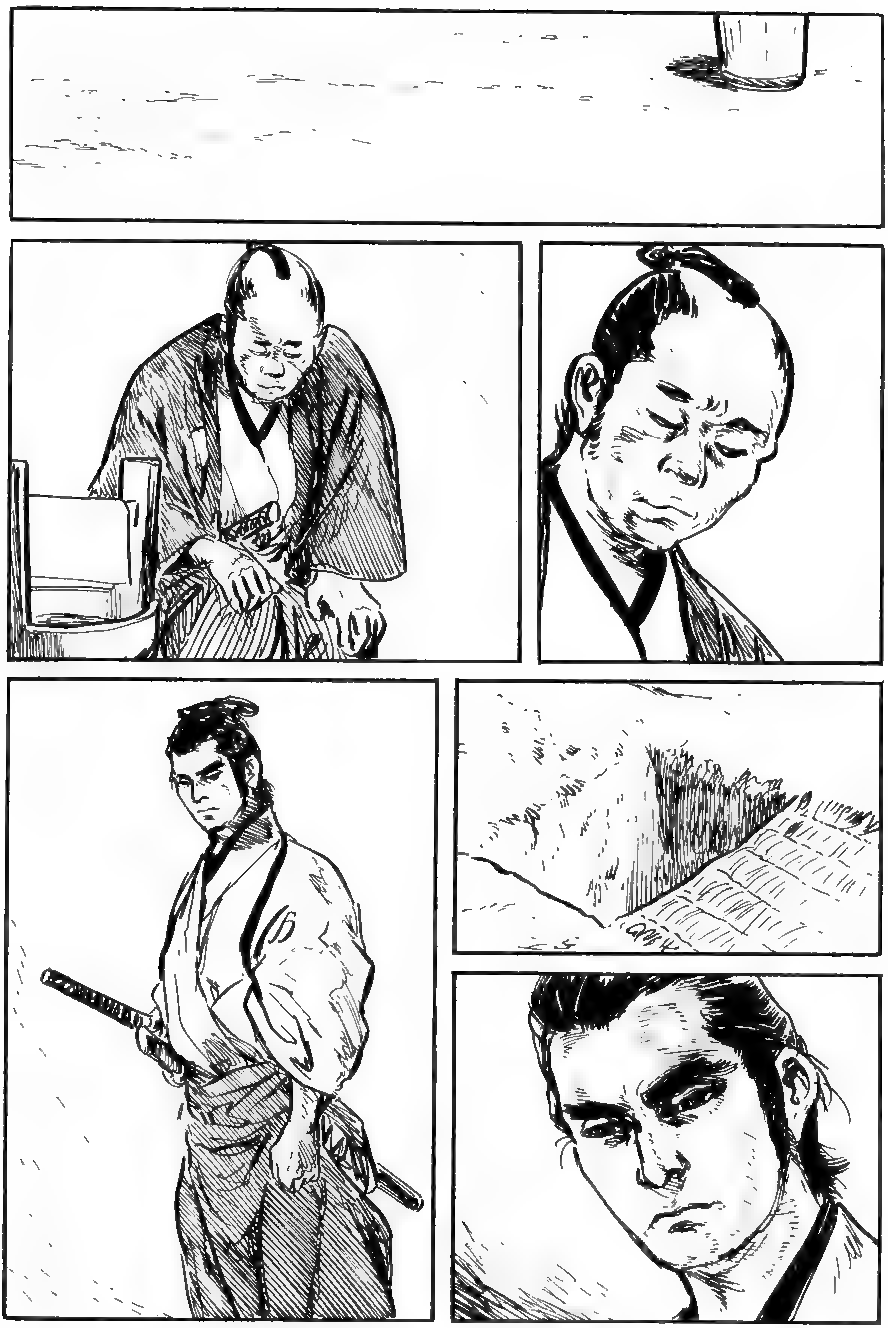
DO YOU HAVE ANY LAST WORDS?
THAT WAS NOT WHY I DRUMMED LAST NIGHT.
I WAS...SCARED. I KNEW I'D DIE THE NEXT DAY... I WAS SHAKING... SO I DRUMMED UNTIL DAWN... IN A TRANCE.
ALTHOUGH DRUMMING FOR FESTIVALS HAS BECOME SECOND NATURE FOR ME...
...I'VE NEVER TOTALLY LOST MYSELF IN MY ART BEFORE.
IF I COULD USE MY HANDS...
...PLAY MY DRUM ONE LAST TIME...
...TO SEND MY SPIRIT TO HELL... I'LL BE HAPPY.

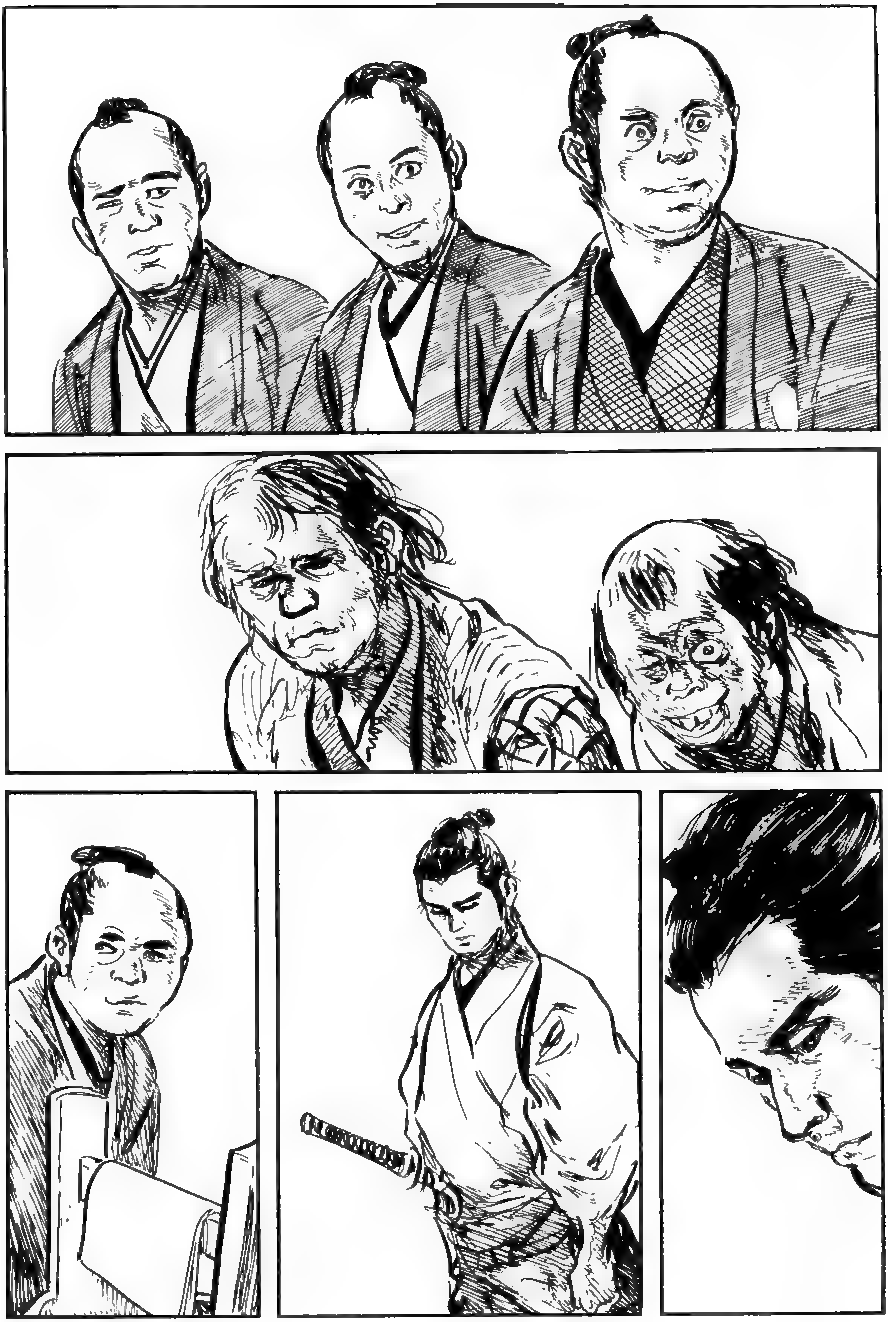
THE POUNDING IS STILL ECHOING IN MY EARS. AS LONG AS I CAN STILL HEAR IT...
HERE GOES! THUMP THUMP T-T-T-THUMP TA-TA! BOOM TA! T-T-T-THUMP! TA-TA!
THUNK
THUMP
BOOM

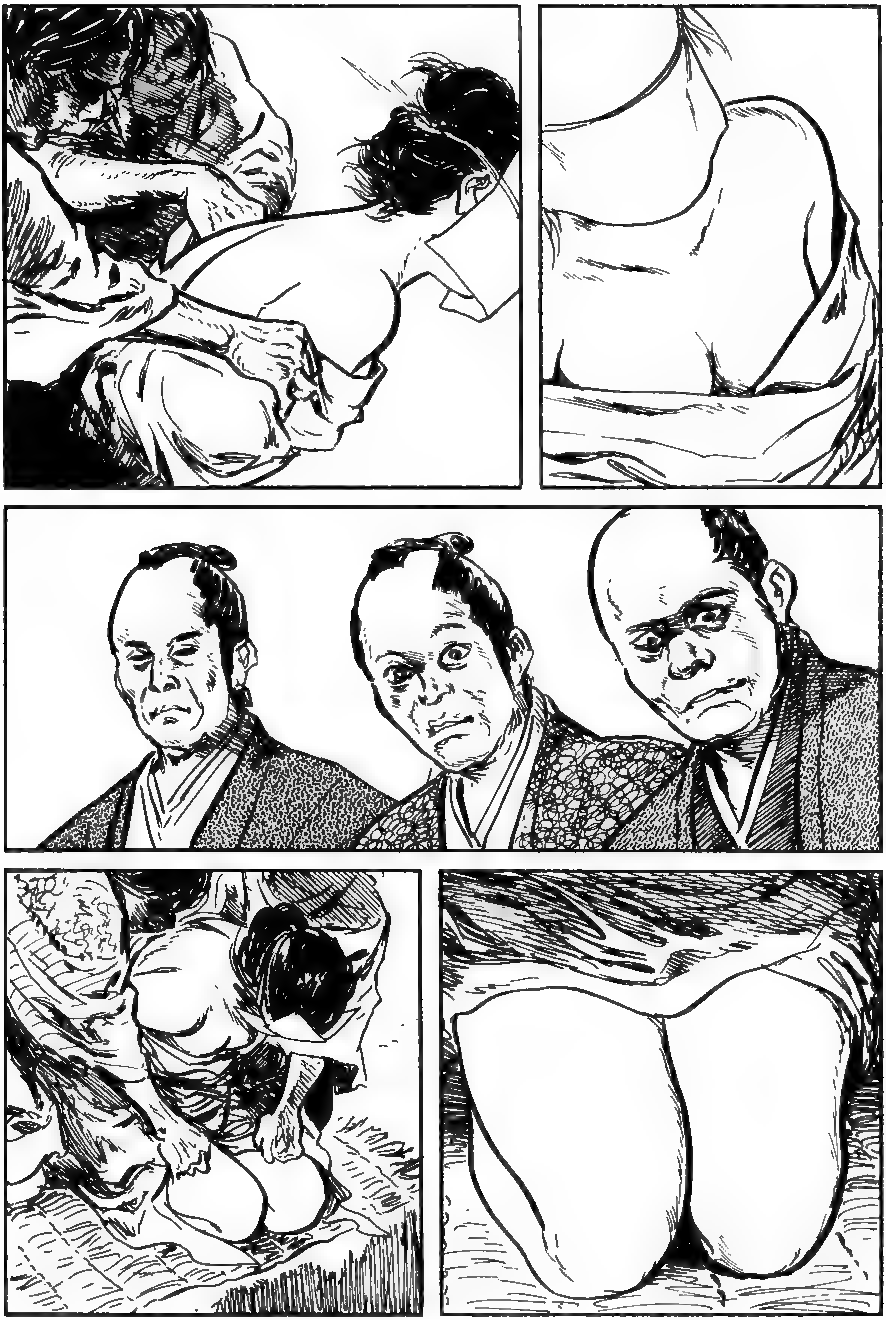
the forty-seventh

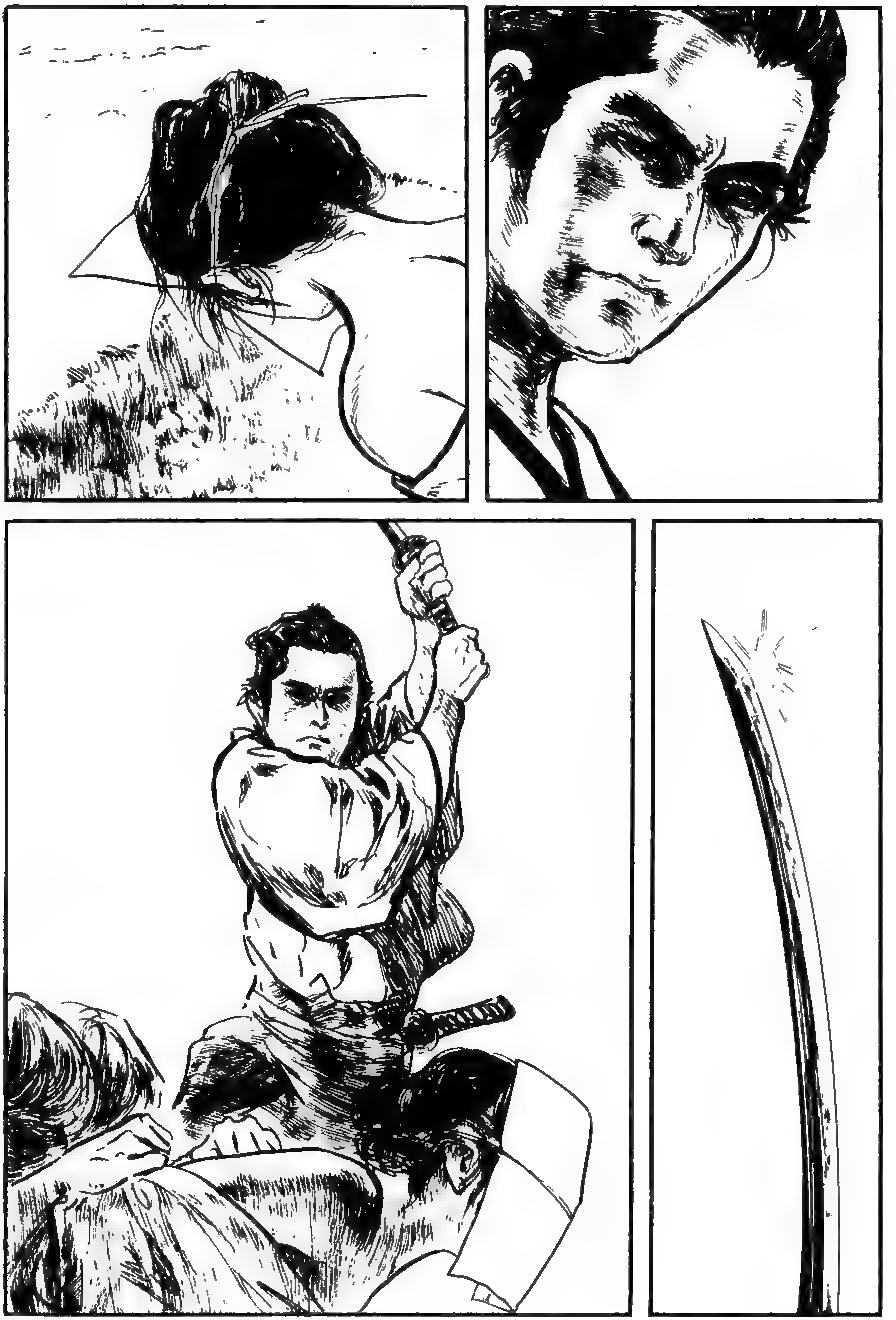
Facing Life and Death









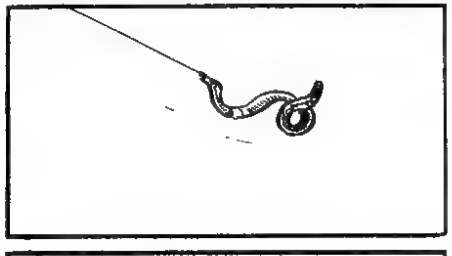


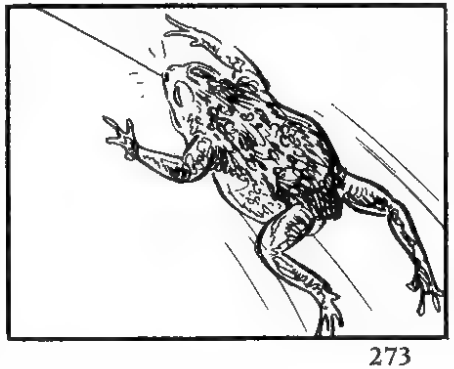
BSHHH

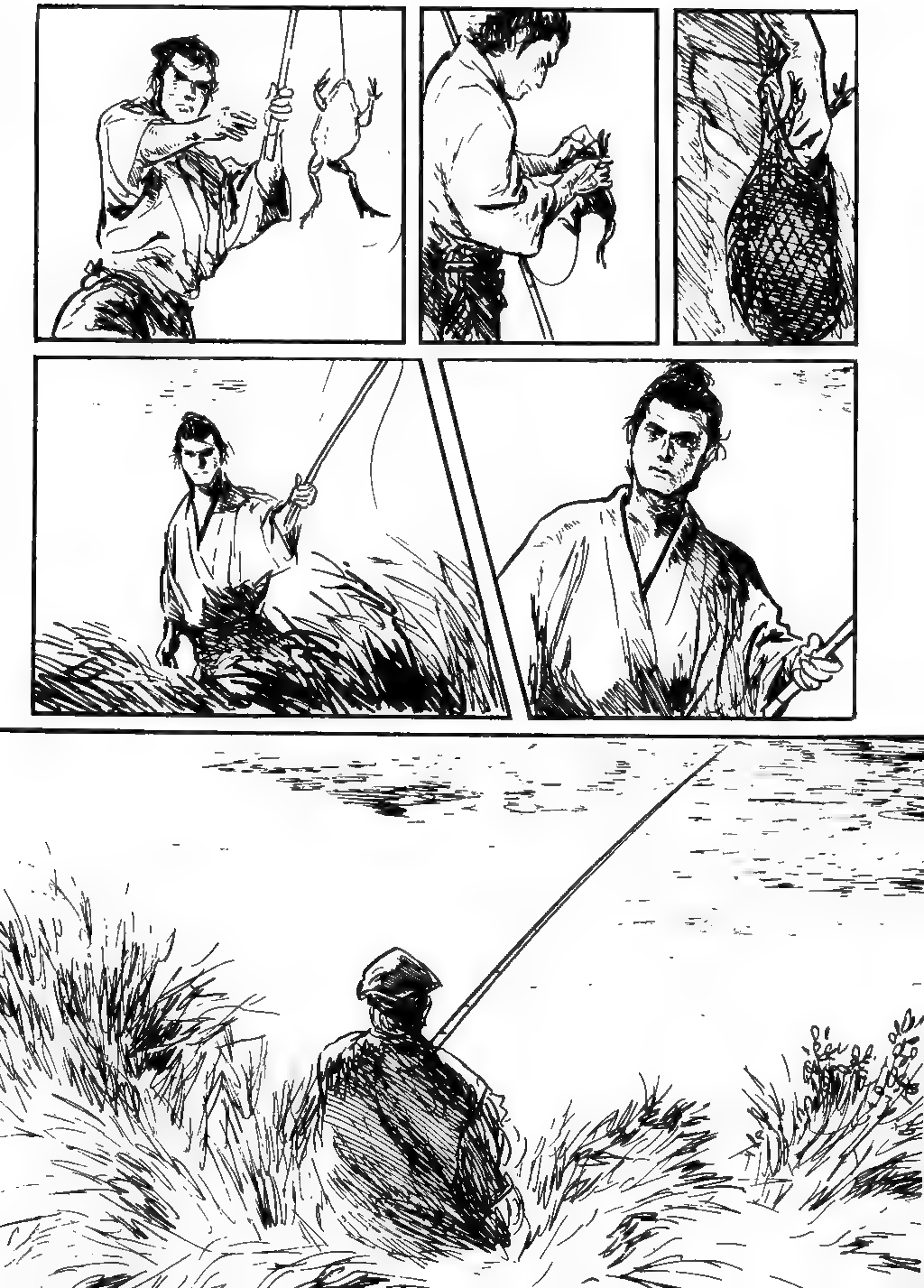
DO FACES...
REVEAL WHAT WE FEEL...
WHEN WE STAND AT
THE PRECIPICE BETWEEN
LIFE AND DEATH?

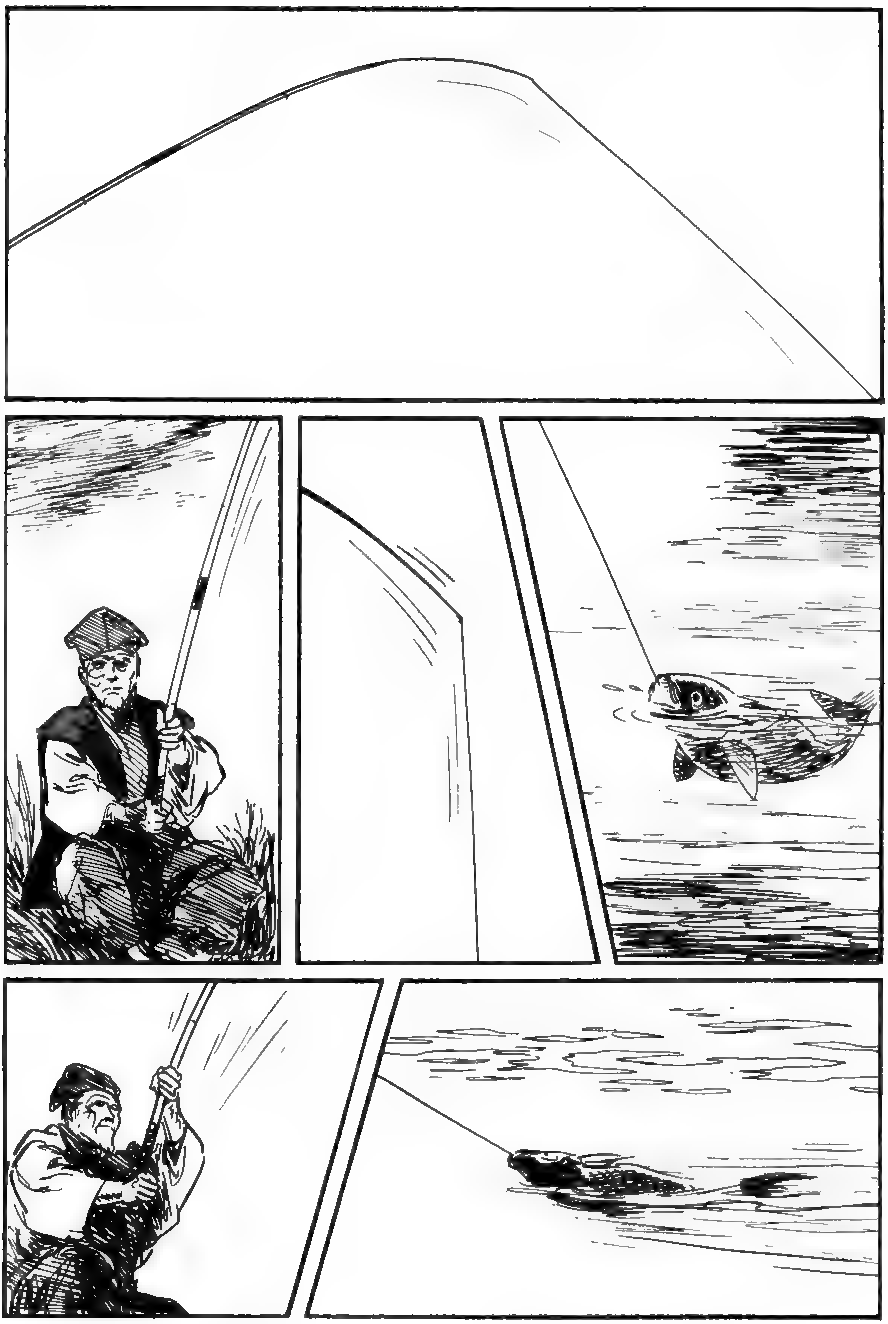
the forty-eighth

Signs of Autumn









HAS ANYTHING CHANGED ABOUT ME?
YOU LOOK DOUBTFUL, BUT...

I'M SORRY. IT WAS SO QUIET, AND I WAS TAKEN A BIT BY SURPRISE...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, QUIET?
WELL...
WOULD YOU MIND?
NO, PLEASE.
I WAS SURPRISED BECAUSE I DIDN'T SENSE YOU WERE HERE. I DIDN'T THINK AN ELDERLY PERSON WOULD EVEN BE HERE.

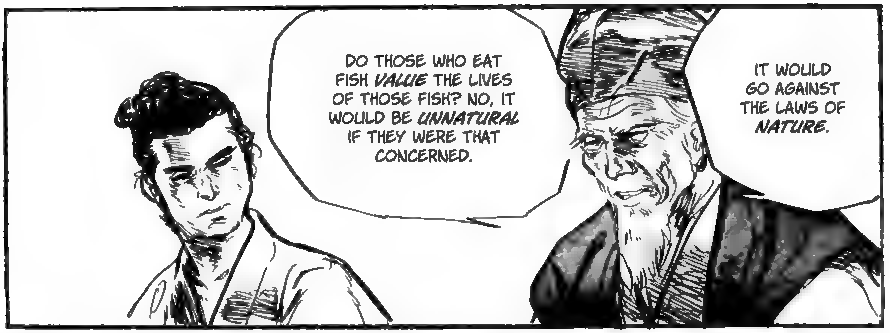
I WAS TRYING TO BE *CAREFUL* WHEN I CAME HERE.
JUST AS RIPPLES IN A STREAM CAN BE CREATED BY A *SINGLE* BLADE OF GRASS, YOUR PRESENCE, WHICH I COULDN'T SENSE *AT ALL*...
...AMIDST SUCH SILENCE *SURPRISED* ME.
HA, HA. HOW *SILLY*.
I WON'T SAY THIS IS *WHY*, BUT...
...WERE YOU *EMBARRASSED* BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T SENSE ME?
N-- NO.

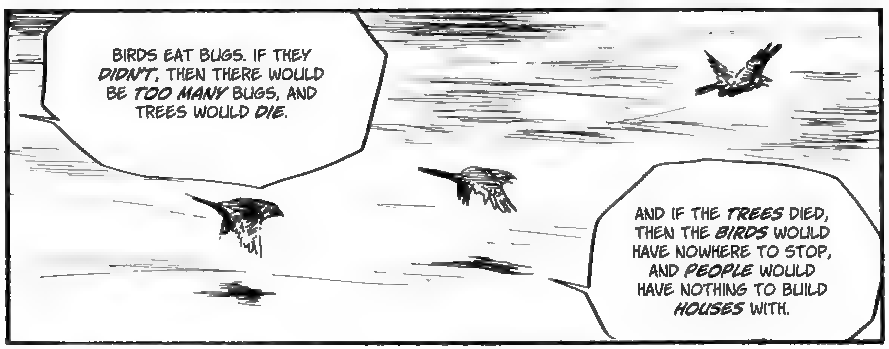
IT IS SAID A SAMURAI WHO *CANNOT* SENSE THOSE NEAR HIM IS *NOT* YET FULLY *PREPARED*.
THAT'S *TRUE*, BUT...
HEH, HEH.
THE CRIMINALS YOU EXECUTE MUST BE *QUIVERING* WITH *FEAR*.
YOU KNOW I'M...?
YOU *MUST* BE EXECUTIONER ASAEMON.
WHO *ELSE* WOULD BE CATCHING TOADS AT THE FIRST SIGN OF AUTUMN?

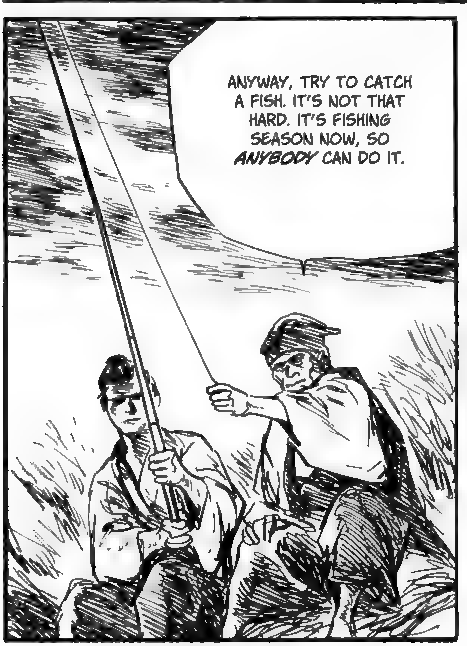
YOU DRY THE TOADS' SKIN IN THE SHADE AND USE IT TO SHARPEN YOUR BLADE.
AM I WRONG?
I-- I'M SORRY.
BUT WHY DID YOU TELL ME THAT THE MEN I KILLED QUIVERED FROM FEAR?
THE CONDEMNED WEAR PAPER OVER THEIR FACES. THEY CAN'T SEE ANYTHING.
BUT EVEN THOUGH THEY'RE BLIND, THEY'RE NOT DEAF. THEY USE THEIR EARS AND HEARTS TO GAUGE THE EXECUTION GROUNDS.
FOCUSING THEIR SPIRITS INTO THEIR HEARTS, THEY TRY TO SENSE THE PRESENCE OF THE ONES WHO WILL SEND THEM TO THEIR DEATHS.

ESPECIALLY THE ONE THAT SENDS THEM TO HELL BY *BEHEADING* THEM.
BUT MAYBE YOU'RE *TOO* "VISIBLE" TO THEM.
WHEN THE CONDEMNED SENSE YOUR PRESENCE, THE RESULTING REVEBERATIONS ONLY *AMPLIFY* THEIR TERROR.
AND *THAT'S* WHY THEY QUIVER.

TRY TO CATCH A FISH.
YOU'VE NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE. I CAN SEE THAT...
AS AN *EXECUTIONER*, I WON'T TAKE LIVES *UNNECESSARILY*-- NOT EVEN THE LIFE OF A *FISH*.
THAT KIND OF THINKING IS WHAT SCARES THE CONDEMNED *EVEN MORE*.
AND SINCE I CONSIDER FISHING TO BE A *GAME*...


DO THOSE WHO EAT FISH *VALUE* THE LIVES OF THOSE FISH? NO, IT WOULD BE *UNNATURAL* IF THEY WERE THAT CONCERNED.
IT WOULD GO AGAINST THE LAWS OF *NATURE*.


BIRDS EAT BUGS. IF THEY *DIDN'T*, THEN THERE WOULD BE *TOO MANY* BUGS, AND TREES WOULD *DIE*.
AND IF THE *TREES* DIED, THEN THE *BIRDS* WOULD HAVE NOWHERE TO STOP, AND *PEOPLE* WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO BUILD *HOUSES* WITH.

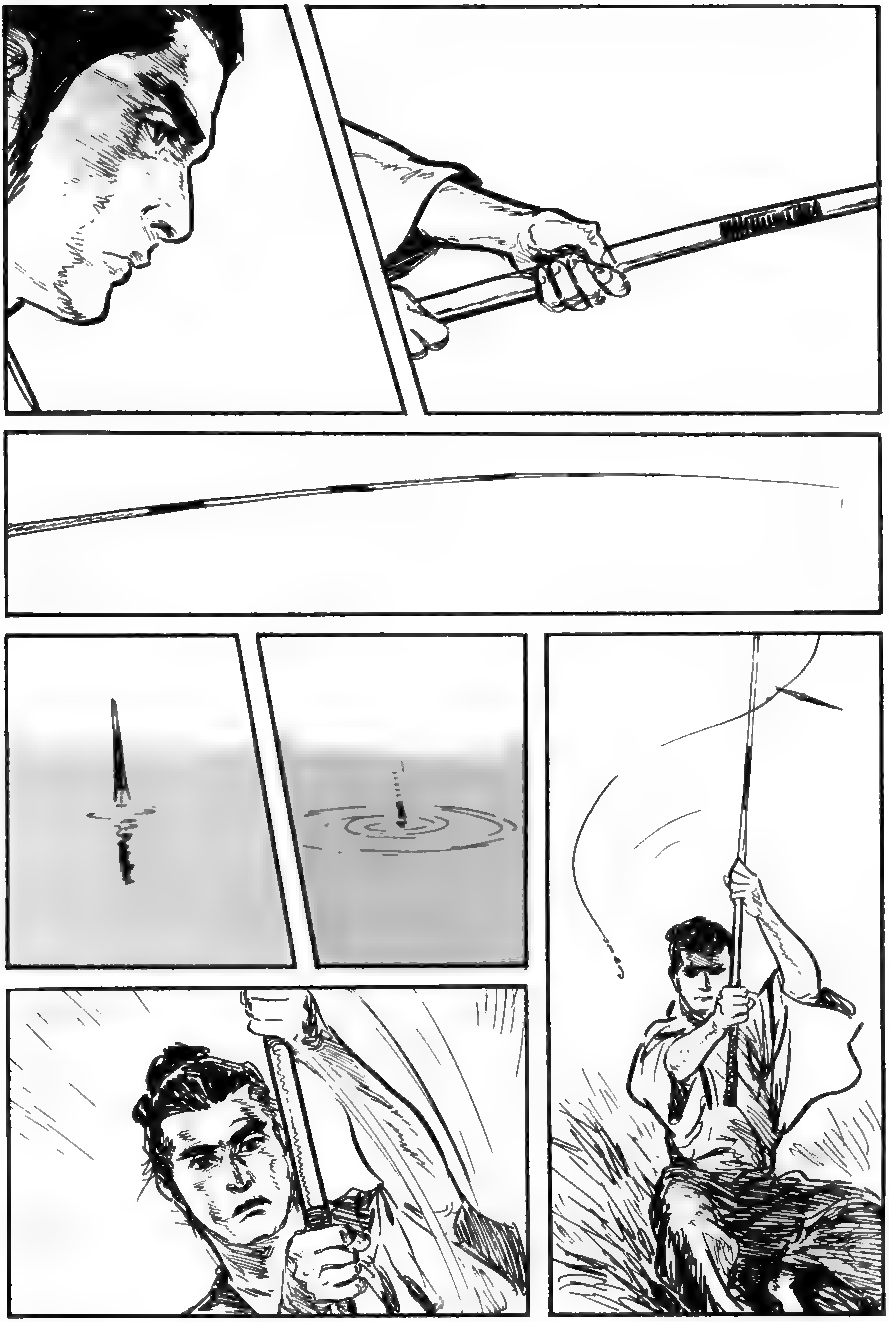

ANYWAY, TRY TO CATCH A FISH. IT'S NOT THAT HARD. IT'S FISHING SEASON NOW, SO *ANYBODY* CAN DO IT.

BUT ONCE YOU'VE PUT THE *FLOAT* INTO THE WATER, DON'T STRAIN WHEN YOU PULL IT OUT. YOU MUSTN'T LET THE LINE SLACKEN. THERE'S *NO* TURNING BACK IN FISHING.

WELL, AIM OVER *THERE.*
THAT'S IT. *THAT'S* THE WAY.
...OR SO I SAID. YOU'RE *NOT* GETTING IT.
PLONK
OVER *THERE.*
THAT'S WHERE I TOSSED IN A *LURE.*
PLONK

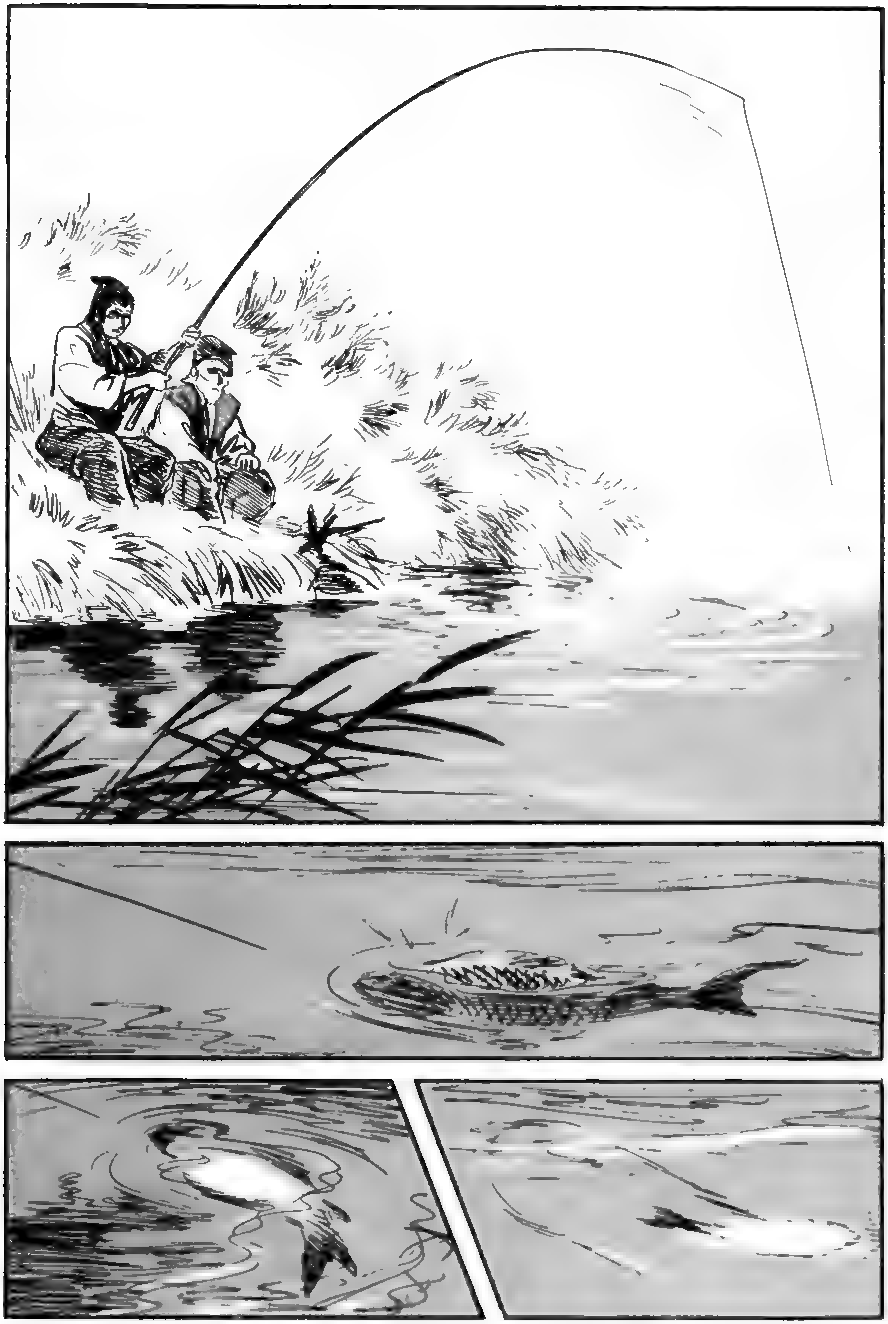
THAT'S HOW. OVER THERE.
THINK OF THE CARP AS A CONDEMNED MAN.
IT'S THE SAME THING.

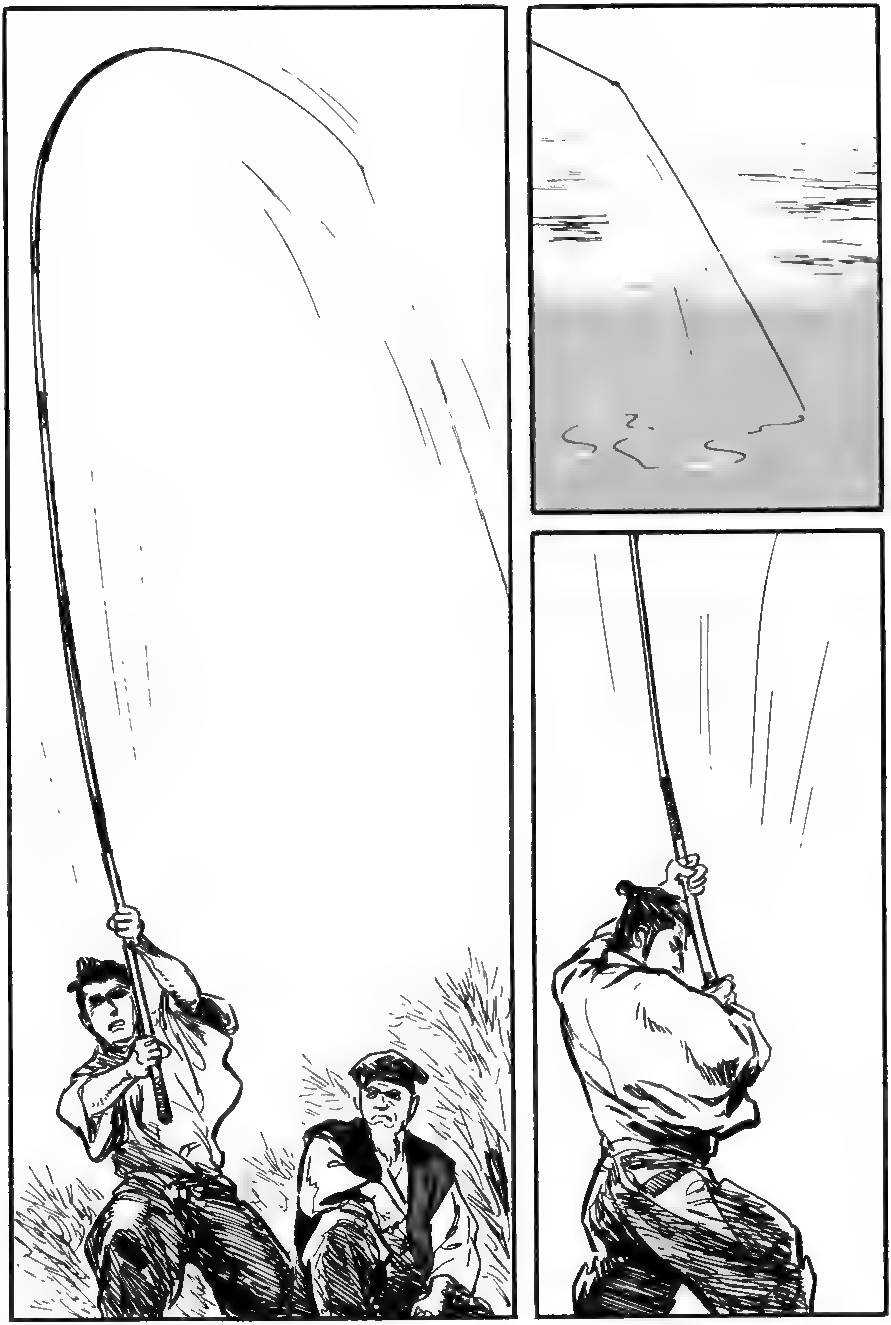
HEH, HEH. IF THE FLOAT'S *RISEN*, THAT MEANS THE FISH'S *BITTEN*. THIS IS THE MOMENT WHEN IT ALL COMES *TOGETHER*. DON'T LET IT OUT OF YOUR SIGHT!



IF YOU STRAIN THE POLE *THAT* MUCH, YOU WON'T EVEN BE ABLE TO CATCH THE *WORST* FISH!
THE KEY IS TO GET THE TIP OF YOUR POLE UP FOR JUST A MOMENT. TIMING IS *EVERYTHING*. CARP SWALLOW THE BAIT, RELEASE IT, AND THEN SWALLOW IT *AGAIN* UNTIL THEY FINALLY GULP IT DOWN ON THE *THIRD* OR *FOURTH* TRY.
THE CARP'S *EVERY* MOVEMENT IS FAITHFULLY TRANSMITTED INTO THE FLOAT. YOU HAVE TO LOOK OUT FOR IT AND RAISE THE POLE AT *PRECISELY* THE RIGHT MOMENT.
ALL RIGHT, GIVE IT A TRY.

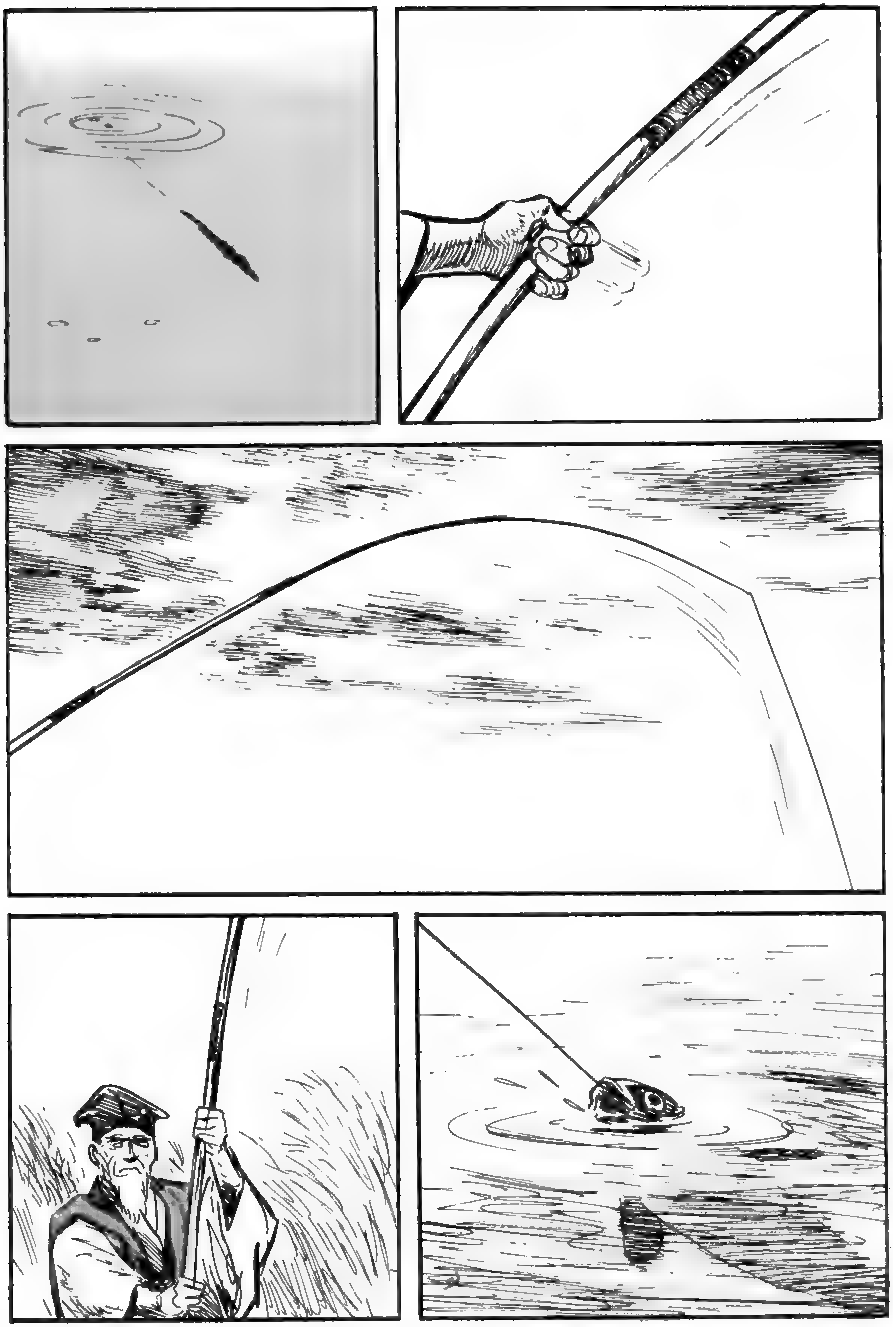
NOT YET.
NOW!

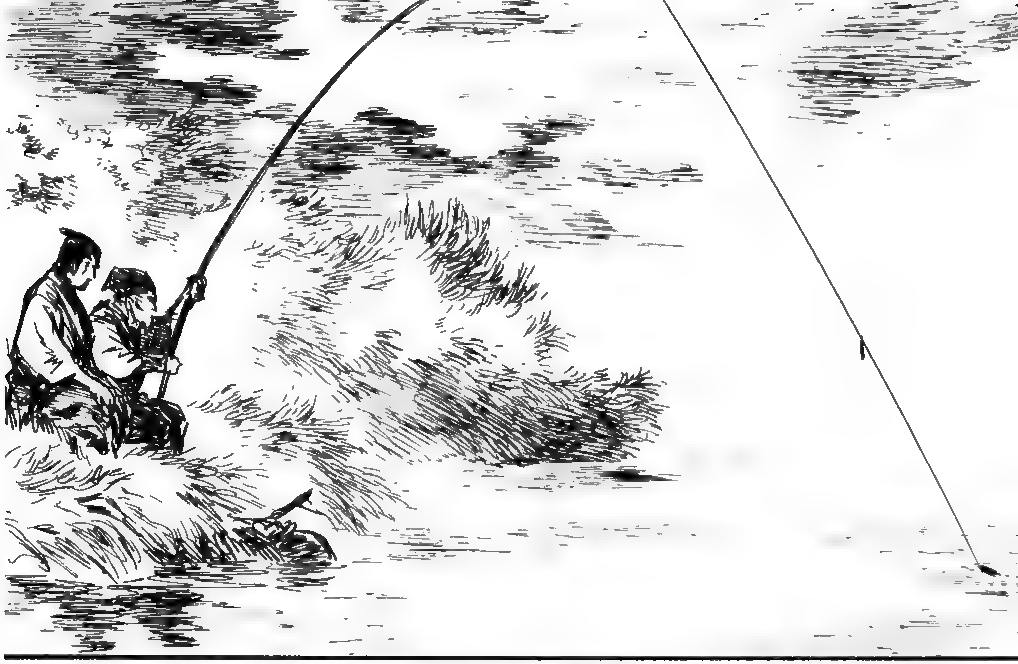


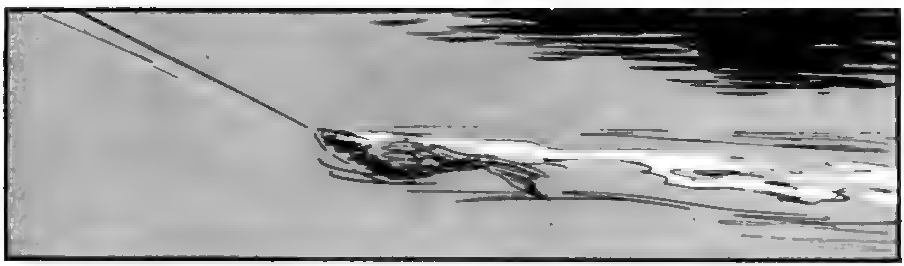


HEH, HEH.
IF YOU LET IT SWIM AWAY LIKE THAT, YOU'LL "CLEAR THE BOTTOM." HEH, HEH.
NOW THAT YOU'VE "CLEARED THE BOTTOM," IT'S SILLY TO GO ON.
IF YOU FISH LIKE THAT, THE CARP WILL GO BERSERK, AND THE OTHER CARP WILL SCATTER SO YOU CAN'T CATCH THEM. THAT'S WHAT "CLEARING THE BOTTOM" MEANS.

EVEN CARP STRUGGLE VIOLENTLY WITH ALL THEIR MIGHT WHEN THEY FACE DEATH.
THE MORE VIOLENT THEY GET, THE MORE YOU TRY TO SUPPRESS THEM--AND THE CARP CAN SENSE YOUR PRESENCE.
WHAT ABOUT HUMAN BEINGS?







OH...

NOW YOU GET IT.
WHEN YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT IT, YOU DON'T HAVE TO FOCUS ALL YOUR ENERGY...
BUT YOU HAVE TO TRY TO PULL OUT THE CARP SO THAT IT DOESN'T REALIZE WHAT'S HAPPENING TO IT AS ITS MOUTH EMERGES FROM THE WATER.
IF YOU DO *THAT*, THEN THE CARP *GIVES UP* AND STOPS STRUGGLING.
THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO IT.

A CARP FEELS A *PRICK* OF PAIN AT FIRST, BUT THEN IT SHOWS *NO* FEAR. IT RECOGNIZES THAT IT IS GOING TO *DIE*. IT KNOWS THAT STRUGGLE IS USELESS. IT KNOWS ITS *FATE*.
AUTUMN COMES UPON US BEFORE WE KNOW IT. NO ONE *SEARCHES* FOR SIGNS OF AUTUMN.
BUT ONCE PEOPLE KNOW AUTUMN IS HERE, THEIR MINDS ARE READY FOR IT, AND THEY PREPARE FOR THE WINTER THAT IS TO COME.
YOU ARE LIKE THE AUTUMN.
AT FIRST THE CONDEMNED DO NOT SENSE YOUR PRESENCE, EVEN THOUGH YOU ARE ON THE EXECUTION GROUNDS. BUT THEN THEY *KNOW*—AND THEN THEY *GIVE UP*.

FLIP
FLOP

YOU MIGHT SAY THAT THE SIGNS OF AUTUMN...
...ARE LIKE THE COMPASSION OF THE EXECUTIONER.
THEY ARE *FORMS WITHOUT FORMS.*
SIGNS OF...
...AUTUMN.

GLOSSARY

bu
Approximately three millimeters.

chō
Section of a city.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Samurai Executioner*:

dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
san – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
sama – used for superiors

hour of the horse
Between 11 A.M. and 1 P.M.

jikisan
A samurai directly under the shōgun.

jitte
Truncheon carried by street cops.

kappa
A water sprite.

ken
Approximately two yards.

kon
Literally, "deep blue."

nashiji
A lacquer finish incorporating gold or silver flakes.

rin
Approximately a third of a millimeter.

setta
A kind of sandal.

shaku
Approximately thirty centimeters.

shinnyū
A Chinese character component resembling the letter "l." used to form characters dealing with motion.

sun
Approximately three centimeters.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman*, Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

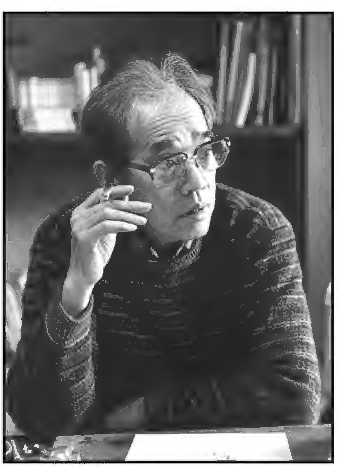
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami (Lone Wolf and Cub)*. Many additional series would follow, including this related series, *Samurai Executioner.*

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.



As the shogun's sword tester and executioner, Asa stands upon the precipice of life and death, his hand holding the final moment of humanity. Such a position is not to be taken lightly, and Asa certainly does not. A stoic man with wisdom beyond his years, the "head chopper" lives and breathes and smells and eats death. And yet he has a tenuous grip on life and its workings. He won't kill without profound purpose, and therefore isn't much of a fisherman. These are the stories of a young man with a dour job, and the lives of those living and dying around him.

Lone Wolf & Cub creators Koike and Kojima bring yet another legendary samurai to print, one of deep humanity entwined in a world of crime and punishment.

Published for the first time in America in the Japanese format.

Punished is not the man himself, but the evil that resides in him.

DARK HORSE MANGA

首斬り朝

FOR READERS 18+
FOR MATURE READERS